# screen

Cover illustration Don Johnson as
Sonny Crockett in Mirror Image
Miami Vice (Courtesy of NBC Inc )

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# ☐screen

# How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport: Shakespeare and the cultural debate about moving pictures

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**1** The order of the authors names was decided by a coin toss The authors collaborated to such an extent that they could not themselves distinguish their individual contributions to the article

### I.   Cheap Amusements and Cultural Crisis

IN December of 1908 the *New York Daily Tribune* editorialized about the need for social control of the new moving picture medium '      The moving picture business is a new business, in the hands of inexperienced persons, conducted in places at best ill designed for the safety of audiences, subject to very little publicity and to every temptation to degenerate into a source of corruption '[2] The *Tribune*'s editorial commended New York City Mayor McClellan for revoking the licences of the city's over five hundred nickelodeons two days earlier. Though New York's producers and exhibitors quickly sought legal remedy and the moving picture shows reopened, the debate and the events around the nickelodeon closings highlight the pressures facing the American film industry during the crucial transitional years of 1907 to 1913  During this period, the film industry struggled to enter the mainstream of American culture, striving to disassociate itself from kindred cheap amusements, such as saloons and vaudeville, and to ally with an emerging cultural consensus.

In the past fifteen years, film scholars have become increasingly interested in the topic of early cinema, that is, the pre-Hollywood or pre-1915 cinema,[3] and have explored aspects of the transitional period, addressing issues of industry organization, audience

**2**   Moving Picture Shows *The New York Daily Tribune* Dec 26 1908

**3**   One manifestation of this interest is the ever-lengthening list of forthcoming books

composition and the transformations of film's subject matter and signifying practices. For the most part, these scholars have limited themselves to film-specific evidence such as the film texts themselves. the trade press, studio publicity and production records [4]

4  See for example the work of Russell Merritt  Robert Allen Charles Musser and Tom Gunning

In this paper, we wish to re-examine one aspect of this transitional moment in relation to the larger culture. Focusing on Shakespearean film production between 1908 and 1913 in the context of Shakespeare's broader cultural circulation, we address one of the primary conditions of production and reception for these films. We do this by adducing evidence commonly associated with cultural rather than film history, though we still maintain an emphasis upon film texts and the film industry  Where possible, we illustrate our argument with one play, *Julius Caesar*, and the filmed version made by the Vitagraph Company in 1908.

Cheap amusements such as penny arcades, dance halls, saloons and vaudeville, in short, any venue for the congregation of the 'lower orders', were connected in the public mind with the problems of rapid urbanization and rising immigration so prominent in the turn-of-the-century United States  The spectre of immigrants and laborers liberated from the regimentation of the workplace and congregating freely to revel in 'crude', 'vicious' and 'lascivious' entertainments struck fear into the hearts of many 'respectable' Americans. Indeed, in New York City as well as several other major urban centres, the problem of cheap amusements had attracted the attention of civic reform groups, resulting in at least fourteen major investigations between 1908 and 1914 [5] These investigations often resulted in recommendations for public and/or private regulation, and can be seen as part of a broader movement to impose social control on both immigrants and the working classes, partially through the formation of an emerging cultural consensus.[6]

5  Alan Havig  The Commercial Amusement Audience in Early 20th-Century American Cities The Journal of American Culture 5 (Spring 1982), pp 1–19

6  On the subject of cheap amusements see for example the work of Lewis Erenberg John Kasson  Kathy Peiss  Roy Rosenweig and Robert Sklar

The relatively new store-front moving picture shows represented the most rapidly growing and, to some, the most dangerous of the unregulated cheap amusements pandering to the masses in their leisure time  The Vice Commission of Chicago reported that·

> Among the recreational conditions directly tributary to the increase of the victims of vice, are the privately managed amusement parks, dance halls,  . candy, ice cream and fruit stores used as pleasure resorts, immoral shows, theatre plays and moving pictures; saloons where music, vaudeville performances, and other recreational attractions are accessory to the drink habit, drug stores, where gambling devices and the selling of cocaine and other drugs are accessories [7]

7  The Vice Commission of Chicago The Social Evil in Chicago  A Study of Existing Conditions (Chicago  Gunthorp-Warren Printing Company  1911) p  230

Film content uncontrolled by private or public interests and ill-regulated dark. crowded. potential fire-trap storefront moving picture shows frequented by immigrants and the working classes

generated intense opposition from religious organizations and other civic activists [8] In 1909, *The Nickelodeon* reprinted an article from *Moving Picture News* which reflected the industry's awareness of its precarious status.

**8** From 1895 to about 1905 films had primarily been exhibited as part of the programme in vaudeville houses In the latter part of the nineteenth century vaudeville entrepreneurs such as Tony Pastor overtly catered to middle-class interests as evidenced by the censoring of programme content admission prices and special strategies to attract women and children

> The motion pictures have made little headway with the intelligent classes . They still remain the cheap amusement of the uncultured classes The deplorable selection of subjects has aroused the feelings of all the newspapers, churches, schools, etc , against motion pictures, to such a point that parents refuse permission to their children to see motion pictures even in churches and school rooms If the manufacturers had catered a little more to the wants of decent audiences, instead of allowing themselves to be guided by the greedy exhibitors, we would see many cinematograph shows in our best districts, we would see motion pictures as an established feature in all of the churches; . we would see them popular in schools, etc.[9]

**9** Scientific and Educational Pictures *The Nickelodeon* Dec 1909 p 166

The most vocal protests against the moving picture shows occurred in New York City, the urban centre with the largest concentration of nickelodeons (estimates in 1908 ranging from 500 to over 800) An array of civic groups, ranging from the Interdenominational Committee for the Suppression of Sunday Vaudeville to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, began to demand government intervention Responding to this pressure, and concerned as well about the dangerous physical conditions of the nickelodeons, Mayor McClellan convened hearings on the moving picture shows. Opponents and proponents of the moving picture fought to define its cultural function *The New York Herald* reported that ' Clergymen and officers of societies to prevent crime . condemned the nickel theatre as a moral sinkhole and physical deathtrap, and those interested in the business defended them as places necessary for the amusement of the poor and for their moral and educational uplifting.'[10]

**10** See in Cheap Shows Peril to Children *New York Herald* Dec 24 1908

'Public spirited' citizens denounced the nickelodeons as dens of iniquity harbouring criminal elements from pickpockets to prostitutes The atmosphere also was said to encourage lascivious behaviour on the part of even the more respectable clientele ' The darkened rooms, combined with the influence of pictures projected on the screens, have given opportunities for a new form of degeneracy '[11] The Mayor, having listened to the testimony, revoked the current licences of all New York nickelodeons, offering reinstatement contingent upon demonstrated compliance with the building code and upon the exhibitor's pledge to observe the Sunday blue laws

**11** R Fellowes Jenkins of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children quoted in *The New York Daily Tribune* Dec 26 1908

The nickelodeon owners quickly responded to this threat to their livelihoods, forming the Moving Picture Association of New York and obtaining a legal injunction countermanding McClellan's

**12** Crucial Hour for the New York Shows *The Film Index* Jan 2, 1909, p 5

**13** For detailed accounts of the Motion Picture Patents Company see Tom Gunning, 'D W Griffith and the Narrator-System' (PhD Diss New York University, 1986) and Robert Anderson 'The Motion Picture Patents Company' (PhD Diss University of Wisconsin, 1983)

**14** Motion Picture Patents Company Advertisement , quoted in Gunning p 447

**15** See Russell Merritt 'Nickelodeon Theaters, 1905–1914 Building an audience for the Movies in Balio T , *The American Film Industry* (Madison University of Wisconsin Press 1976) pp 83–102

**16** Picture-Show Men Organize to Fight *The New York Times* Dec 26 1908

**17** Crucial Hour'

revocation. While the exhibitors sought and obtained legal remedy, the film producers developed more long-ranging strategies for transforming the new medium from despised cheap amusement to widely accepted mass entertainment. During the hearings, J. Stuart Blackton, co-founder of the Vitagraph Company of America ' . explained to the Mayor how the very recent merging of interests would facilitate better control over the moral atmosphere of the productions '[12] Only a week before the nickelodeon closings, the most powerful elements of the film industry, headed by the Edison and Biograph Studios, had formed the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), a trust intended to regulate distribution and exhibition and to respond to increasing pressures on the film industry from public and private critics [13]

The formation of the MPPC signalled the film industry's implementation of strategies for dealing with the incipient crisis on several fronts The MPPC strove to gain public support, instituting a short-lived attempt at site regulation and a long-lasting scheme of self-imposed censorship which involved the creation of the National Board of Censorship This Board would ensure that films would be 'Moral, Educational and Cleanly Amusing', serving both to attract a more desirable patronage and to uplift the current clientele [14]

Though not clearly mandated by the MPPC, making films 'moral, educational and cleanly amusing' entailed transformations of subject matter and signifying practices as well as the omission of offensive material During 1908–09, film manufacturers increasingly drew material from such respectable sources as Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tennyson At the same time, their narrative structures came increasingly to resemble that of the socially acceptable 'realist' novel and play, rather than that of the declassé melodrama Some film scholars have seen these adaptations as part of a ploy to attract a more 'middle class' audience [15]

The film industry, perhaps already feeling public pressure, had been pursuing this last strategy prior to both the formation of the MPPC and the 1908 nickelodeon closings On December 1, 1908, the Vitagraph Company had released its *Julius Caesar* Surprisingly, given its eminently respectable derivation, the critics of the nickelodeon denounced this film as emblematic of the evils of the moving picture A clergyman claimed that a moving picture 'show was immoral' because of the representation of 'an actual scene in Julius Caesar' Apparently, the Mayor agreed [16] J Stuart Blackton served as the motion picture industry's spokesman at McClellan's hearings. He defended his film from further charges of immorality predicated upon Julius Caesar's wearing of 'a short skirt, Mr Blackton showed the costume is historically accurate, and that the Vitagraph Company could not regulate the skirts of the noble Romans of long ago' [17]

The Roman Emperor continued to haunt the proceedings On

Christmas Day, several hundred of New York City's exhibitors met
to organize their defense. Many referred ironically to the censorship
of *Julius Caesar*, unable to believe that anyone could possibly find
filmed Shakespeare immoral or objectionable. The 'morality joke'
became a running gag as 'they cheered the great Julius time and
again and altogether had a merry Christmas time of it.' They
pointed to *Julius Caesar* as a primary example of film's contribution
to culture. 'Several of the orators appealed to the shade of Julius
Caesar to acclaim the moving picture as an artistic triumph of the
century, a triumph which no devotee of the liberal arts could ignore
and every true artist must celebrate.' The exhibitors also referenced
the film's theatrical antecedents, as if to gain respectability through
this alliance. 'The shades of old William Shakespeare, of Booth and
of Barrett, of Davenport and several others were called upon to
witness "this blasphemous libel upon their royal selves and of the
character they set forth".'[18] Indeed, the players in the Vitagraph
film were alleged to have been garbed in the very costumes worn by
their theatrical predecessors.

The defaming of Caesar remained a cause *célèbre* among the
moving picture folk well after the brouhaha surrounding the
nickelodeon closings had subsided. The film trade press responded
to attacks on the film, *The Nickelodeon* implying that even the
moving pictures' uneducated and immigrant clientele knew
Shakespeare well enough to resent censorship of the film. An article
quoted 'an Italian'. 'The Romans – they killed Julius Caesar. Then
show it – all of it. Why not? It took place. For what is the
censorship board – to give us skimmed milk and spoil art? In Rome
they wore the *toga virilis* to the knee. Now they show it long and

18 'Show Men Will Fight', *The New
York Daily Tribune*, Dec 26,
1908. The exhibitors referred to
several nineteenth century actors
well known for their enactments
of various roles in the play
Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett
and Edward Loomis Davenport

19 *The Nickelodeon* Sept 1909 p 71

20 *The Nickelodeon* Jan 7 1911 p 12

21 Robert Hamilton Ball *Shakespeare on Silent Film A Strange Eventful History* (London George Allen and Unwin, 1968) This book provides an excellent overview of Shakespeare on the silent screen

22 *Vitagraph Life Portrayals* Jan 17–Feb 1, 1912 p 21

23 For more on Shakespeare s position in late nineteenth century America, see Lawrence Levine *Highbrow Lowbrow The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge Harvard University Press 1988)

clumsy. For why? Would they put corsets on the "Venus of Milo"? Bah '[19] The Chicago police had actually demanded the excision of the film's assassination scene. Three years later Blackton still voiced his disgust 'They cut out the killing of Julius Caesar. Ye Gods! Imagine a couple of brawny policemen walking on the stage of a New York theatre and (not) politely ordering E H Sothern to "cut out the murder part, cull". '[20]

Despite Caesar's contentious reception, the industry persisted in its Shakespeare strategy. From 1908 to 1913, American film companies produced at least thirty six fifteen minute Shakespearean films, while importing a great many more foreign Shakespeare productions Among the plays most frequently filmed were· *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Additionally, films such as a *Comedy of Errors* (Solax, 1913) used Shakespearean titles, while other films such as a *Village King Lear* (Gaumont, 1911) presented versions of the plays in contemporary settings Variant American titles, along these lines, included· *A Modern Portia* (Lubin, 1912), *Taming Mrs. Shrew* (Rex, 1912); and *A Galloping Romeo* (Selig, 1913) [21] Many of these films emphasized their Shakespearean connections, as did *Indian Romeo and Juliet* (Vitagraph, 1912) 'It is far more Shakespearean than Shakespeare '[22]

In the face of initial discouragement, why did the film industry persist in its Shakespearean adaptations? Clearly, as the members of the industry themselves indicated, the negative reception of the Vitagraph *Julius Caesar* conflicted with the generally valorized position of Shakespeare in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American culture.[23] But this assertion alone cannot fully explain either the film industry's production of Shakespearean films or the probable reception of those films among a wide spectrum of viewers. While we may never know with certainty why certain cultural authorities objected to the Vitagraph film, examination of the film industry's discourse concerning its Shakespearean adaptations can at least begin to illuminate the conditions of production for these films

## II.  Shakespeare and Film

The industry had several good reasons to produce these particular films at this historical juncture First, in the wake of the 1907 *Ben Hur* copyright decision, studios were acutely aware of material in the public domain, and knew that Shakespeare was not only respectable but free Secondly, as we will demonstrate, Shakespeare may have been far more accessible to a diverse spectrum of viewers than may be apparent from a late twentieth century perspective

Thirdly, Shakespeare provided as many thrills – duels, illicit romances, murders – as the rankest cheap melodrama And fourthly, if critics accused filmmakers of excessive depiction of duels, etc , the industry could feign outraged innocence and wrap itself in the Bard's cultural respectability Yet trade press utterances and publicity copy never mentioned any of these motivations, focusing rather upon the uplifting qualities of Shakespeare while at the same time assuring exhibitors that this uplifting fare would not drive away their present clientele

Shakespeare has formed a part of the literary canon for so long that we take for granted the equation of his works with cultural respectability. Yet examination of the similar utterances of turn-of-the-century cultural arbiters as diverse as Andrew Carnegie and immigrant uplift associations reveals greater complexity. In 1903, Carnegie, funder of countless libraries and museums, addressed the New York City immigrant aid society, The Educational Alliance, to which he also contributed He stressed the assimilationist possibilities of the playright's works, an emphasis particularly appropriate in light of the Alliance's efforts to Americanize the thousands of Eastern European Jewish immigrants pouring into New York City. 'But, ladies and gentlemen, language makes race You give me a man who speaks English and reads Shakespeare     You give me that man, or that young woman, and I don't care where he was born, or what country he comes from     '[24] Carnegie was not alone in his assessment of Shakespeare's Americanizing potential In 1886, Thomas D Weld advanced reasons for the inclusion of Shakespeare in school curricula, one of which was a thinly veiled nativist stance 'Nothing would so withstand the rush into our language of vapid, foreign dilutions as a baptism into Shakespeare's terse, crisp, sinewy Saxon '[25]

Progressive groups such as the Educational Alliance and the People's Institute, a civic reform and educational organization, believed that productions of Shakespeare's works had many beneficial effects they would keep people from cheap amusements, teach them moral lessons, and generally improve them, in short, the productions had '    . educational and inspirational value     '[26] Thomas Davidson, who lectured at the Educational Alliance, remarked on the moral lessons Shakespeare teaches. 'How we hate hypocrisy after reading "Measure for Measure"; reckless ambition, after reading "Macbeth"; indecision, after reading "Hamlet", and so on'[27]

Many studios, such as the Vitagraph Company, which accounted for the bulk of the American Shakespearean productions, specifically referenced the films' high cultural associations and benefits, echoing the sentiments of civic reformers and uplifters The Biograph Company claimed that its *Taming of the Shrew* (1908) would provide 'an object lesson – "See ourselves as others see

24 *Eleventh Annual Report of the President and Board of Directors* (New York Educational Alliance 1903), p 82

25 Theodore D Weld 'Shakespeare in the Class room' *Shakespeariana* 3 (1886) pp 437–8

26 Charles Sprague Smith A Theatre for the People and the Public Schools *Charities* Feb 4 1905 p 5

27 Thomas Davidson *The Education of the Wage-Earners A Contribution Toward the Solution of the Educational Problem of Democracy* (New York Ginn and Company 1904) p 80

28 Eileen Bowser (ed ) *Biograph
Bulletins 1908–1912* (New York
Octagon Books 1973) p 35

us " '28 In reviewing the Vitagraph Company's *Twelfth Night* (1910),
*The Moving Picture World* said,

> It elevates and improves the literary taste and appreciation of the
> greatest mass of the people, performing in this way a service
> which cannot be measured in material terms. Such work is the
> nature of an educational service which is deserving of the heartiest
> support of all who are working for the improvement of
> humanity [29]

29 *The Moving Picture World*
Feb 19 1910 p 257

The industry also expected that viewers would be able to engage
with the films on various levels, suggesting different receptions for
different segments of the audience  Both studio publicity and the
trade press implied that some viewers came to the nickelodeon with
detailed knowledge of the Bard and his plays and enjoyed the films
through narrative engagement  The same sources also implied that
other viewers enjoyed these films either through engagement with
their spectacular elements, or through narrative comprehension
gained from lectures or extremely simplified plots  *The Vitagraph
Bulletin* emphasized the dual appeal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
(1910) 'Students of the great dramatist's works will thoroughly
enjoy the careful pictorial presentation of the many scenes, while
the whole play is so clearly portrayed that it will not fail to delight
the spectator who is not familiar with the works of Shakespeare '[30]

30 *The Vitagraph Bulletin*
December 1–15  1909

Successful streamlining sometimes produced a narrative whose
coherence, claimed the filmmakers, transcended that of the original
source. The *Biograph Bulletin*, promoting *The Taming of the Shrew*,
boasted that its adaptation resulted in 'one of the snappiest, funniest
films of the kind ever made      only the stirring, interesting portions
of the play are depicted; at the same time the story is clearly,
though concisely told.'[31]

31 Bowser  p 35

Discussions of spectacle often figured in reviews of Shakespearean
films  Reviewing Vitagraph's *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1908), *The
New York Dramatic Mirror* referenced both clarity and spectacle
Comparing it to the favourably received *Richard III* (1908), the
reviewer said, 'It is clearer in telling the story, and even more
elaborate in the spectacular features. The costumes and scenic

32 *The New York Dramatic Mirror*
Nov 14 1908 p 10

effects are of the finest. .    '[32]

The industry seems to have assumed that the more affluent and
better educated viewers whom it wished to attract with Shakespeare
would engage with the narratives while the spectacular elements
would appeal to the nickelodeon's old clientele. But what were the
conditions of reception?

## III.  Shakespeare's Cultural Circulation

Shakespearean texts had far-reaching manifestations, encompassing
everything from relatively inexpensive editions of the complete

works, to inclusion in school curricula, to ephemera such as advertising cards, to various theatrical productions. We believe that knowledge of these 'intertexts' and their circulation more fully illuminates conditions of production and reception for *Julius Caesar* and other filmed Shakespeare than does film-industry discourse alone. This wider array of evidence permits discussion of how Shakespearean texts functioned in the culture. While these texts originated from specific institutions (school curricula and textbooks, advertising, etc ), they circulated among a broad class spectrum, creating the conditions for a multiplicity of modes of engagement with Shakespeare and the Shakespearean films. In other words, delineating the general cultural circulation of 'Shakespeare' permits speculation about the range of possible negotiations of *Julius Caesar* [33]

Despite the pervasiveness of Shakespearean texts at the turn-of-the-century, contemporary commentary indicates that knowledge of Shakespeare was, for the most part, limited to familiarity with famous phrases, speeches and scenes 'We read about Shakspere [sic], listen to lectures about Shakspere, talk about Shakspere, quote Shakspere; but not one in ten thousand of us can really read common passages of Shakspere intelligently.'[34] In a piece entitled 'Is Shakespeare Popular?', the editor of *The North American Review* summarized the Bard's place amongst a particular social formation in early twentieth century culture. He asserted that everyone of 'average education' and 'respectable tendencies' had certainly been exposed to Shakespeare and may even have owned a volume of the Bard's works. Yet this did not guarantee that they either understood Shakespeare or continued to read him. 'The great question is, what does the tired man read when he comes home from business, and what does the worn-out mother of the family read when she has time to fold her hands and sit still? And the truthful answer is that he reads the evening paper, and she reads the advertisements in the back of the magazines to see what she *would* buy if only she could pay '[35]

Yet even in their preferred evening papers and advertisements, the 'tired man' and the 'worn-out mother' could not have escaped the Bard, whose cultural presence extended even to these venues. To adumbrate the incredible pervasiveness of Shakespearean images and phrases in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, we look first at one of the most important of Shakespeare's manifestations – public school curricula. We then briefly discuss a selection of Shakespearean ephemera. Finally, we look at the Shakespearean activities of New York City institutions involved in 'uplifting' the city's immigrants and wage-earners.

Exposure to Shakespeare in public schools, for a certain age cohort, would have been systematic and widespread, since attendance through the eighth grade was legally mandated in most

33 We are aware that such an approach potentially establishes an infinite regress of negotiations. We would argue however that exposures to a particular topic within the broader fabric of the supravening cultural context help to delimit and structure patterns of reception This approach attempts to address the tension between on the one hand the infinite interpretative possibilities of the individual subject and on the other the determinism of social construction by exploring the resonant variations of a particular figure's cultural presence and the patterns of its social circulation

34 Why Shakspere is Not Understood *The World's Work* 5 (1903) p 3249

35 Is Shakespeare Popular? *The North American Review* 184 608 (1907) pp 334-5

locations. Such exposure may also have constituted the clearest instance of the Bard's role in the formation of cultural consensus, particularly in New York City's public schools, whose resources at the time were devoted almost entirely to 'Americanizing' the children of the newly arrived immigrants A common culture was represented in the excerpts from key scenes and key speeches which constituted much of the Shakespeare covered in the classroom.

New York City curricula guides mandated Shakespeare at every level, beginning with the memorization of Ariel's Song 'Where the Bee Sucks' in grade 2B In Grade 8B students read 'This was the Noblest Roman of Them All ' Eighth grade curricula also included the reading of Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare*; *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*. The *New McGuffey Fifth Reader*, widely adopted in public schools, included both 'Under the Greenwood Tree' from *As You Like It* and 'Antony's Oration over Caesar's Dead Body'

The above tells us that students memorized and read Shakespeare, but does not tell us how they were taught or what they might have learned Though intended for college students, the outline for study for *Julius Cœsar* in the journal *Education* gives some notion of how educators taught this play The outline for study suggests three readings of the play: the first for narrative comprehension, the second for dramatic qualities and the third for broader cultural resonance Included in the outline for the third reading is a list of 'the most striking scenes of the drama': 'Caesar and his train; the thunderstorm; the midnight meeting; Brutus and Portia, Portia on the Ides of March; the assassination; over Caesar's body; the tent scene; the parley; the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus '[36]

While teachers may have wished to incorporate their students into the cultural consensus, contemporary comments indicate that, as one would expect, reception was incredibly diverse. What might students actually have learned? Not much, asserted a *Harper's Weekly* column. 'Nearly everyone in the educated class who was questioned had read one or two plays, usually at school, but nearly all held mistaken ideas about what they had read, and had a most superficial knowledge of the construction of the plays, the significance of the characters, and the points of preeminent excellence.'[37] A short piece in *The Atlantic Monthly*, put together from 'several examination papers lately presented at an academy in Pennsylvania' confirmed this impression 'Then Caesar reached the Senate safe, but Cascada stabbed him deep and Brutus gave him the most kindest cutting, which made the tyran yell. Eat, too, Brutus?'[38] Apparently both teachers' lessons and students' reception simply centred on key phrases, scenes and speeches.

Meanwhile, the pervasive Shakespearean cultural ephemera both reflected and reinforced Shakespeare's central place in the dominant culture and attested to wide-spread familiarity with his work, even if

36 Maude Kingsley 'Outline Study of Shakespeare s *Julius Caesar*, *Education*, 22 4 (1901) p 229

37 Is Shakespeare Read? *Harper s Weekly*, 51 2615 (1907), p 152

38 'A School Comment on Shakespeare s *Julius Caesar*, *The Atlantic Monthly* 96 3 (1905), p 431

income, reading habits, consumption patterns, etc. meant varying exposures to it. Relatively inexpensive versions of Shakespeare proliferated Shakespearean references even surfaced in the popular penny press directed at working class readers. For example, in 1889 *The New York World* issued a complimentary city guide A short piece, 'The National Game', listed twenty seven Shakespearean quotes meant to 'convince one that the game [baseball] is of remote origin'. Among these 'A hit, a palpable hit.' (*Hamlet*) and 'Let me be umpire in this.' (*Henry VI*) [39]

Other Shakespearean ephemera, most with a strong visual component, abounded: stereographs, sculpture, illustrated calendars with 'quotes of the month', writing tablets, again with quotes and illustrations, and card games. Here we will just give examples of advertising specifically related to *Julius Caesar* N K. Fairbanks and Company, Lard Refiners, issued a series of tradecards (circa 1880–90) featuring 'familiar quotations' from the Bard One shows a pig in a rendering vat The quote under him reads 'Let me have those (sic) about me that are fat, sleek headed chaps (sic), and such as sleep o'nights' [40] A tradecard for Libby, McNeill and Libby's Cooked Corned Beef shows caricatures of a plump toga-clad Caesar and Brutus conversing about a slim Cassius lurking in the background Caesar complains 'Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look, [ . .] would he were fatter.' Brutus suggests feeding Cassius the advertiser's product A card for Barker and Company Coal shows Brutus and Cassius in Roman military costume with the caption, 'Away, slight man' – a verbatim quotation

*The Albany Times* issued a holiday greeting containing parodies of well known literary and historical characters. In one of these, toga-clad Romans sit reading a newspaper. Caesar's assassination is depicted in the smoke rising from a lamp An insert shows a newspaper article about the assassination Among the several headlines: 'Great Caesar's Ghost', 'Butchered to Make a Roman Holiday', (Byron, 'Childe Harold',) and 'Imperial (sic) Caesar, dead and turned to clay, may (sic) stop a hole to keep the wind away' (Hamlet, V i ) [41] Probably either the newspaper staff's ignorance or their estimation of their readers' knowledge of Shakespeare accounts for the fact that none of the three quotations comes from *Julius Caesar*

The slight misquotings and elisions on the trade cards and in the almanac perhaps reflect the way in which such 'familiar quotations' became common parlance The illustrations suggest one means by which visual representations of Shakespearean characters became fairly standardized Both trade cards featuring the play's characters show them in the proper attire for the quoted scenes, the images both reflecting and reinforcing a sense of the appropriate iconography Yet the caricatured and parodistic nature of the images in combination with their hucksterish purpose make clear that

39 *Cyclopedia of Useful Information and Complete Handbook of New York City* (New York New York World 1889) p 48

40 Meat Food Green Boxes Bella C Landauer Collection The New York Historical Society

41 Broadside Collection New York Historical Society

Shakespeare was no sacred cow. This use of Shakespearean scenes and phrases also attests to widespread recognition that may have transcended class barriers. Products such as lard and corned beef were probably not sold simply to the 'respectable' middle classes

While school curricula and cultural ephemera potentially crossed class boundaries and served many functions for recipients, 'uplift' institutions, primarily located in New York City's tenement districts, specifically directed Shakespeare at the immigrant and working classes associated with the nickelodeon and other cheap amusements. Organizations such as settlement houses, the YMCA, the Ethical Culture Society, the New York City Department of Education's Bureau of Lectures, the Educational Alliance, and the People's Institute, all sponsored lectures, classes, clubs and theatrical productions, many centred around Shakespeare's plays and characters

Obviously, Shakespeare, the 'greatest' poet of the English language, proved powerfully attractive to those seeking to acculturate the non-English speaking immigrant as well as the illiterate working man James Hamilton, Head Worker of the University Settlement, wrote to the People's Institute supporting its plans for a People's Theatre and mentioning the recent Shakespearean productions at the Educational Alliance.[42]

> No intellectual tonic could be finer or more stimulating A good percentage of the audiences have not long been masters of the English Language They have scarcely crossed the threshold of our literature. What a grand and inspiring entrance was here provided for them – the best English Literature ever cast in dramatic form     [43]

The hegemonic implications of this Shakespearean fare did not go unnoticed A reporter for the *Boston American* criticized the uplifters' efforts, declaring that 'wage-earners' should not have Shakespeare forced down their throats but should rather do their own thinking and select their own entertainments. 'Why should theatrical benevolence always take the form of Shakespeare? Apparently because Shakespeare is safe, and is supposed to be good for the blood '[44]

One should not assume, however, that cultural arbiters such as the People's Institute were forcing Shakespeare upon the 'lower orders' Indeed, the Educational Alliance asserted that its lower East Side clientele already had a taste for Shakespeare for which the Alliance's activities catered.

> There is no necessity on the East Side to *create* a taste for the fine and elevated in literature. The taste is there All that is necessary is to guide its development. The classes in Shakespeare and in English literature can well serve as the barometer of the literary

**42** The Educational Alliance funded by wealthy German Jews, ran a settlement house and immigrant aid society in the heart of the lower East Side The Alliance offered its members a variety of Shakespearean fare lectures, recitals, plays, classes and clubs The Alliance s members responded so favourably that 'hundreds are turned away from performances because of lack of room (Minutes of a Meeting of the Advisory League, April 19 1906 Papers of the Educational Alliance RG 312 #14 YIVO)

**43** Letter from James Hamilton Head Worker University Settlement Society to Michael M Davis, Secretary, People s Institute Nov 23 1905, Box 16 People s Institute Records the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division The New York Public Library (Hereafter PIR, RBMD/NYPL)

**44** 'Dramatic Soup Kitchens The American (Boston) March 18 1906 Box 37 PIR RBMD/NYPL

45 *Eleventh Annual Report*, p 44

atmosphere permeating such part of the lives of the working people of the community as is not taken up with earning their daily bread [45]

Ben Greet, an English theatrical actor manager whose company performed under the auspices of both the Educational Alliance and the People's Institute, argued that a proposed Shakespeare Memorial should be located below Fourteenth Street 'so as to be within easy reach of the mass of the people For it is among "the people", in contradistinction from "society", that Shakespeare is most appreciated '[46] Certainly, the prevalence of Shakespeare in New York City's Yiddish and Italian theatres further attests to the playwright's widespread popularity

46 Ben Greet, 'For the Greatest Theatre in the World, *The Worlds Work* April 1911 pp 14222–9

Consistent with their hegemonic intent, as well as attempting to appeal to the evident interests of the community, the People's Institute sponsored a series of ongoing Shakespearean recitals at the Cooper Union, supplementing the Bard's inclusion in their lecture series. By 1905, these recitals had become so popular that 500 to 1000 people were turned away each night during the Christmas week performances.[47] *The New York Evening Mail* described an audience at what became the traditional Christmas recital:

47 *Ninth Annual Report of the Managing Director to the Corporation of the People s Institute*, Oct 1906 n p PIR Box 1 RBMD/NYPL

Their attention was close, their eyes eager, their faces full of intelligent appreciation. There was no clapping of applauding hands because someone else did so. There was no someone else to them save the characters portrayed by the man on the platform before them. The applause, given with appreciation quite as much for the literary passages as for the emotional dramatic climaxes, burst like waves on the shore from all parts at once [48]

48 'Shakespeare on the East Side *The New York Evening Mail* Jan 7 1905 Box 37, PIR RBMD/NYPL

In May, 1904, the Ben Greet Company gave three performances at the Cooper Union under the auspices of the People's Institute, performing the *Merchant of Venice* twice and *Twelfth Night* once [49] The performances, including a special matinee for school children, sold out and generated favourable publicity for the People's Institute [50] The Greet Company continued to give numerous performances under the auspices of both the People's Institute and the Educational Alliance

49 *Seventh Annual Report of the Managing Director to the Corporation of the People s Institute*, 1904 p 8 Box 1 PIR RBMD/NYPL

50 Judging by the copious press books in the New York Public Library the People s Institute was extremely astute in public relations matters keeping the New York papers and the national press fully aware of its every activity

The evident success meeting the Shakespearean offerings of such institutions as the People's Institute seems to attest to Shakespeare's cross-class appeal. This popular response may have substantiated the film industry's perceptions of its Shakespearean films as appreciated by 'the greatest mass of the people ' Examining professional theatrical production patterns complicates matters however, for one sees that Shakespeare, despite the film industry's hopes of attracting a more affluent audience, seems not to have enjoyed a great deal of popularity amongst those capable of paying the full price for an evening at the theatre A 1909–10 survey of amusements in

Manhattan shows that production patterns exhibited a remarkable similarity to late twentieth-century Broadway. The contemporary equivalents of *Cats, The Chocolate Soldier* and *The Dollar Princess*, both musical comedies, each ran for 240 performances in the 1909–10 season In the same season, no Shakespeare play performed at the high price or so-called 'standard' theatres made the list of successful, long running performances Indeed, plays such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* ranked at the bottom of the list of the shortest running plays, with five and four performances respectively

Curiously enough, in that season, nine Shakespeare plays appeared on the boards of the 'standard forty' (out of a total of 121 plays performed) while nine out of the 64 productions of the lower-priced theatre were Shakespearean (i.e. almost twice the proportion of Shakespeare than at the higher priced venues).[51] The evidence would seem to indicate that the majority of people attending Shakespearean plays in New York City during this period did so either at the cheaper legitimate theatres or at the free performances of the uplift organizations

Contemporary comments on the theatrical scene indicate that Shakespeare's popularity at the higher priced theatres depended upon compliance with the nineteenth century trend toward ever more elaborate and spectacular staging ' the sum expended in the production of one play of Shakespeare on the current over-elaborate scale would cover the production of two or three pieces mounted with simplicity and a strict adherence to the requirements of the text We are told, however, that a very small public would interest itself in Shakespeare's plays if they were robbed of scenic upholstery and spectacular display '[52] The 1907 Robert Mantell production of *Julius Caesar* conformed to audience expectations. 'The general appeal of the performance is enhanced by the pictorial quality of the settings, the various scenes being carried forward in a manner which if not strictly Shakespearean, is of value in stimulating imaginations which have grown sluggish under the conditions of modern existence.'[53]

Contemporary evidence also seems to indicate that the 'people' were capable of appreciating a Shakespeare devoid of spectacle The one-man recitals at the People's Institute attracted overflow audiences The Ben Greet Company presented Shakespeare to enthusiastic People's Institute audiences in the stark Elizabethan manner. Said the actor-manager ' . the plays as I have given them, do not depend upon the spectacular attraction which is so large an element in the appeal of the conventional Shakespearean production of our time, with its dependence upon richness of scenic effect, and its consequent sacrifice of the poetic and dramatic integrity of the text.'[54] We do not, of course, wish to imply that the workers and immigrants of the lower East Side would have rejected free or inexpensive spectacularly staged productions or not have

**51** Michael Davis *The Exploitation of Pleasure A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City* (New York Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), pp 29–43

**52** Sidney Lee 'Shakespeare and the Modern Stage *Littel's Living Age* 224 2901 (1900), p 541

**53** *The New York Times* April 30, 1907 p 9

**54** Ben Greet Shakespeare and the Modern Theatre *Harper s Weekly* November 4 1905 p 1604

**55** Many of the denizens of the lower East Side may also have attended Yiddish and Italian theatre productions of Shakespeare which would also have lacked the spectacular staging of the standard theatres and emphasized the text and the performances

**56** Montrose J Moses Where They Perform Shakespeare for Five Cents , *The Theatre Magazine* Oct 1908 p 265 Among its theatrical activities the People's Institute sponsored a half-price ticket programme for students teachers and wage earners selecting beneficial plays many Shakespearean productions among them for their edification

**57** Moses, p 264 Contrary evidence also exists however *The Film Index* spoke to the manager of a nickelodeon at 118 Rivington Street who said that The most elaborately produced Shakespeare plays don t appeal to them (the lower East Side audiences) much they don t understand them What our patrons like most is sentiment and emotionalism that appeals to their better nature ( Seeing the Pictures *The Film Index* December 25 1909 p 4)

attended the uptown productions had they the money In the absence of these alternatives. however, one-man recitals and starkly staged productions would have constituted their primary exposure to Shakespeare.[55]

Of course. the Shakespearean films constituted part of the circulation of Shakespearean texts. and may actually have had greater potential for elevation and improvement than even the People's Institute. since filmed Shakespeare may have reached those to whom the free or inexpensive offerings of New York's uplift educational institutions remained inaccessible. Theatre historian and critic Montrose Moses. writing in *The Theatre*, stated that people too poor to afford even discounted theatrical admissions sought uplifting culture at the nickelodeons. 'In numbers measuring over two hundred thousand throughout New York City. this kinetoscopic clientele is composed of people who cannot afford to go to the theatre, even though such an organization as the People's Institute strive (sic) to reduce for them the theatre prices along Broadway '[56]

Moses went on to discuss a lower East Side nickelodeon specializing in Shakespearean films. indicating that some amongst the immigrant population did indeed attend and enjoy these films The proprietor was 'anxious to make of his five cent theatre an educational center among the children and grown people of the lower East Side, and to judge by the manner in which the crowds are flocking through the gaily painted entrance, and by the overflow left standing on the sidewalk waiting for the next performance, there is no doubt that [he] is meeting with success '[57]

## IV. Conditions of Production and Reception for *Julius Caesar*

The non-film evidence we have presented concerning Shakespeare's cultural circulation permits us to contextualize and thus complicate the film industry's discourse on several levels While a late twentieth century perspective might lead one to associate Shakespearean subjects simply with 'high culture' or 'respectability', we have seen that Shakespeare was in fact culturally pervasive during this period Certainly, Shakespeare's inclusion in school curricula supports the respectability argument, but the eager embrace of Shakespeare by people 'below Fourteenth Street' suggests other sorts of popular appropriation If high-priced Shakespeare at the standard theatres relied heavily upon spectacular elements, the presentations to which the 'masses' were exposed foregrounded the verse rather than the staging, reversing the conclusion one might draw from industry discourse alone

We can further explore the issue of audience reception by specific reference to *Julius Caesar* The film, shot on painted theatrical sets in the standard tableau style of the period. is a compression of the

Shakespearean text  the fifteen shots omit six of the play's seventeen scenes  Vitagraph's publicity release described the film as follows:

> Scene 1 – Street in Rome  Casca and Trebonius upbraid the citizens for praising Caesar  Scene 2 – The Forum. A soothsayer bids Caesar 'beware the ides of March.' Scene 3 – Mark Antony wins the race and 'thrice he offers Caesar a crown.' Scene 4 – Cassius tempts Brutus to join the conspiracy against Caesar. Scene 5 – Brutus's garden  Meeting of the conspirators. Scene 6 – Caesar's palace  Calphurnia tells Caesar of her dream and begs him not to go to the senate. The conspirators enter, laugh at his fears, urge and get his consent to go. Scene 7 – Street near Capitol. The soothsayer again warns Caesar  Scene 8 – The Capitol. The assassination of Caesar  Scene 9 – The Forum  Brutus addresses the mob. Antony enters with Caesar's body. Scene 10 – Brutus' camp near Sardis  Cassius upbraids Brutus. Scene 11 – Brutus' tent – quarrel – Caesar's ghost  Scene 12 – Plains of Phillipi  Armies of Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, and Brutus and Cassius  Scene 13 – The Battle  'Caesar, thou art revenged even with the sword that killeth thee ' Scene 14 – Brutus slays himself. 'Caesar, now be still. I killed not thee with half so good a will ' Scene 15 – Brutus funeral pyre. 'This was the noblest Roman of them all.'[58]

**58**  Julius Caesar An Historical Tragedy  *The Film Index* December 5, 1908  p 9

Late twentieth century viewers might find this fifteen shot, fifteen minute film a somewhat inadequate realization of Shakespeare's lengthy and complex original text. Yet, the film is consistent with the key phrase, key scene, key image approach to Shakespeare that we have discovered in much of the cultural ephemera of the period. The film contains four direct quotes and a paraphrase of some of the play's best known lines, foregrounded by the Vitagraph publicity  Just as the film features key phrases, it features key scenes  Above we mentioned the college study outline which enumerated the 'most striking scenes of the drama'  Of the ten scenes listed, eight appear in the Vitagraph film  The scenes omitted both from this list and the film deal with Mark Antony and his co-rulers, perhaps indicating a culturally prevalent narrative simplification. Architecture and costuming accord with the images circulated on Shakespearean ephemera, such as the trade cards we have described. The film thus fits the culturally prevalent 'reductionist' approach to Shakespeare we have sketched out, and contemporary viewers, Shakespearean scholars perhaps exempted, would have found the Vitagraph film perfectly consonant with their previous exposure to the play.

If the key scene, key phrase treatment of Vitagraph's *Julius Caesar* accorded with the Shakespeare who circulated across class boundaries, such was not the case with the film's staging, which employed the spectacle of the higher-priced theatre rather than the stark presentations of, for example, the Ben Greet Company  The

film's action takes place in front of sets painted to resemble Roman architecture Stephen Bush, in *The Moving Picture World*, compared Vitagraph's 'excellent' representation of the Forum to the famous painting by Gerome.[59] The on-screen depiction of off-stage action further illustrates Vitagraph's incorporation of spectacle In the play, during Act I, scene ii, Mark Antony thrice offers Caesar the crown offstage, while onstage, Brutus and Cassius listen. The film's third shot, preceded by the intertitle 'Mark Antony three times offers Caesar the crown,' shows Caesar seated in a grandstand, surrounded by a crowd of extras While he watches the race which Shakespeare's Casca only describes, Antony presents the crown to him Indeed, we suspect that the producers emulated the elaborate staging and costumes of the theatre as closely as possible precisely to appeal to an audience which at this time primarily attended the theatre rather than the nickelodeon The referencing of the stage tradition through claims about the theatrical antecedents of the Vitagraph Company's costumes supports this conclusion.

What, then, can we conclude about the reception of *Julius Caesar* and other Shakespeare films? As we suggested above, even if the film industry chose Shakespearean subjects for their hegemonic function, the period's parodic forms, such as advertising cards, indicate that Shakespeare could be taken lightly. While cultural arbiters and educators may have played up the Bard's uplifting and even Americanizing potential, lard and corned beef manufacturers circulated 'vernacular' Shakespeares which counted on an easy familiarity with the 'great' works. Hence, response to filmed Shakespeare would have depended to some extent upon a viewer's previous exposure to specific intertexts, as would readings of the films' representational strategies The minimalist rendering of the text would have surprised neither the nickelodeon's current patrons nor more affluent viewers that *Julius Caesar* and other Shakespeare films may have attracted But the film's representation of spectacle may have been read differently by viewers from different social formations Viewers accustomed to the spectacular staging of the high-priced theatre would have found much in the Vitagraph production that was familiar But how might those viewers accustomed to recitals and minimal staging have responded to the spectacular elements of the Vitagraph film? Was their visual pleasure affected by the absence of the familiar verbal text?

Our evidence allows us to draw three broad conclusions about the conditions of reception for *Julius Caesar* in particular and Shakespearean films generally 1) Shakespeare would have had a range of possible associations, ranging from the hegemonic to the parodic, 2) most viewers would not have found the 'reductionist' interpretation of the text surprising, 3) some viewers would have expected and appreciated the spectacle, while others may have found it an unexpected bonus, but missed a fuller narrative engagement [60]

59 *The Moving Picture World*
Dec 5, 1908, p 447

60 While our examination of culturally pervasive Shakespearean intertexts permits us generally to characterize the conditions of reception characterizing the particular reception of actual historical viewers falls outside the realm of historical investigation we would not presume to reconstruct an actual historical viewer s negotiation of a particular text which would have depended not only on his/her exposure to a variety of intertexts but upon an intersecting web of social determinants (age race ethnicity gender etc ) as well

But the shade of Julius Caesar haunts us still. None of the
intertexts we have adduced would suggest anything in the slightest
degree immoral or objectionable about this play. Why then the
complaints from Chicago officials and the New York clergy? Francis
V.F. Oliver, the chief of the New York City Bureau of Licenses,
which regulated the nickelodeons, uttered a very revealing statement
about the play and the filmed version. 'Scenes of crime and
depravity on the stage, which are witnessed by the most respectable
people in the land, seem to be too violent and harmful in their
effects upon the minds of the young to be permitted in show
houses. . . . Brutus must not murder Caesar in the presence of our
children.'[61]

Mr. Oliver's opinion concerning the relative harmfulness of
theatrical and filmic depictions of depravity provides an insight
which may begin to answer our question. We have asserted that the
film industry, at least discursively, sought to ally itself with cultural
arbiters whose efforts at social control took the form of establishing
a cultural consensus. The film industry attempted to forge this
alliance through the selection and, in most cases, the reverent
treatment of culturally valorized texts, which accounts for the
abundance of Shakespeare films. But compliance with the concept of
appropriate culture advocated by the industry's adversaries
apparently required more than the selection of valorized texts and
the correct discourse concerning them.

Most Shakespearean texts and intertexts circulated in venues
which carefully structured reception and sought to restrict textual
polysemy. The standard theatre had mechanisms for controlling both
audiences and interpretations. The price regulated audience

61 *The Film Index*, Nov 12, 1910,
p 1

composition, and certainly prohibited the attendance of unaccompanied children, while newspaper reviews policed content and provided interpretive guidelines. In the wake of the nickelodeon closings, the *New York Daily Tribune* argued that the theatre required no censorship, but that the moving picture certainly did. 'Public safety on the moral side is, moreover, no better provided for, there being practically no supervision of the character of the [moving picture] shows given, and the need of censorship being very different from that in the case of theatres, where the press keeps the public informed of what is being presented '[62] School curricula and textbooks attempted to contain polysemic texts, as teachers' manuals and other instructors' aids favoured some interpretations over others  Film on the other hand, escaped such control mechanisms, the exhibitors not regulating audience composition or attempting to structure reception, while the daily programme changes precluded popular press reviews [63]

Our paper has demonstrated the importance of non-filmic discourse for an understanding of the conditions of production and reception of early cinema. Admittedly, *Julius Caesar* was an anomaly, as the outraged protests of the exhibitors as well as the lack of similar complaints directed against other Shakespearean adaptations indicate. But the case of this film in no way invalidates the utility of the intertextual method this paper has proposed. We would argue that augmenting film-specific evidence (the films themselves and the industry's own discourse) with intertextual evidence more fully illuminates the conditions of cinematic production and reception

[62] Moving Picture Shows' *New York Daily Tribune*, Dec 26 1908

[63] Except in those cases where films were accompanied by lectures  of course

# The She-man: Postmodern bi-sexed performance in film and video[1]

## CHRIS STRAAYER

Cinema's double standard regarding nudity has fixed opposing modes of sexual signification for women and men Certain makeup and costume styles have conventionally coded a woman's surface as sexual and announced her sex. At the same time, also conventionally, her sex has a relatively high chance of being displayed explicitly at another time in the movie. The eventual availability of her breasts and other sexual areas as cinematic rewards have insured, by temporal contiguity, the essential content of her 'mask'.

In contrast, the historic absence from view of the penis in cinema has allowed the male body an independence from sexual anatomical verification It is his charging about that has identified a male film character as male, yet it is his penis that has invested him with the cultural right to charge about – the signifier *in absentia*. Richard Dyer and Peter Lehman have written about the difficulty of maintaining the penis-phallus alliance in case the penis is seen onscreen [2] In actuality, the penis (man's hidden 'nature') cannot compare to the phallus (man's cultural power) It is the generic narrative threat of bodily exposure, as much as his 'feminization' via costume, that has 'emasculated' the male crossdresser, i.e., castrated his symbolic phallus, in temporary transvestite films such as *Some Like It Hot* (1959, Billy Wilder) and *Tootsie* (1982, Sidney Pollack).[3] At the level of performance, feminine garb ironically both accentuates the male's secondary sex characteristics, thus signalling his 'nature', and keeps his genital biology out of view.

What I want to emphasize here is that, in classical cinema

representation. female sexuality is actually present both in the masquerade of femininity and in the female body, whereas male sexuality is doubly absent. It is present on the male body but remains unseen and therefore unavailable When symbolized as the phallus, power displaces sexuality rather than delivers it. It is this 'visible difference' that (although traditionally undermined by comic constructions) allows the male crossdresser the *potential* for an intense double-signification of sexuality, containing both macho male sexuality via the unseen penis, and female sexuality displaced onto visible display via masquerade.

This potential is most evidenced by a contemporary phenomenon in popular culture that contests the traditional conditions and compromises of crossdressing in mass media – the appropriation of female coding by a male performer as a straightforward empowering device, rather than an emasculating comic ploy This transgressive figure, which I term the She-man, is glaringly bi-sexed rather than obscurely androgynous or merely bisexual Rather than undergoing a downward gender mobility, he has enlarged himself with feminine gender *and* female sexuality

In *Mother Camp* Esther Newton relates the drag queen's reliance on visible contradictions, as opposed to the transvestite's attempt to pass as the other sex.[4] Laying bare his feminine masquerade by baring a hairy chest, the drag queen makes obvious the superficiality and arbitrariness of gender costuming. But in *Pink Flamingos* (1972, John Waters), a 'transbreastite' squeezes this contradiction onto the body, disrupting sexual as well as gender signification The sight of 'his' hormonally-produced breasts is followed by 'his' exposed penis, an incongruity that outgrows its own binary opposition

In *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975, Jim Sharman), bisexual, transsexual Dr Frank N Furter (Tim Curry) makes lipstick look macho and undulates a black garter belt in aggressive, seductive exhibitionism In *Pink Flamingos*, a nude male dancer executes anal acrobatics with phallic nerve and Medusan humour, and Divine puts a steak between her legs to simultaneously parody the rhetoric of women as meat and embody the taboo of menstruation, thus pushing the transgression of sex beyond anatomy to physiology In *La Ley de Deseo/Law of Desire* (1987, Pedro Almodovar), the 'slutty', male-to-female transsexual Tina (played by a woman – Carmen Maura), under a jet of water and clinging dress, harks back to a classical harlot, then later outslugs a policeman like a 'real' man – or a real 'woman' In *Shadey* (1987, Philip Saville), Oliver (Anthony Sher), a 'woman trapped in a man's body', is stabbed in the testicles with a kitchen knife and responds with a look of *jouissance*

Today, sex role stereotypes are 'up for grabs' The attitude of Tina Turner's 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' has reversed the sexual expressivity (cries of sexual oppression) once embodied in

4 Esther Newton, *Mother Camp Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp 97–111 For additional discussion of drag in relation to crossdressing and transvestism see Chapter 6 of my dissertation

The Rocky Horror Picture
Show
(All pictures in this article are
taken by the author and
courtesy of The American Film
Institute unless otherwise
stated)

Janis Joplin's screeching romantic masochism. And, in her 'One Man Show', Grace Jones' 'feeling like a woman, looking like a man', gives a new bodily relevance to Marlene Dietrich's transvestism/persona. In *Consuming Passions*, Judith Williamson describes the firm, narrow-hipped, boyish body of transsexual Tula (who appears in the Smirnoff Loch Ness advert) as a contemporary blueprint for women – 'the male form as the ideal for females' according to the body image industry of modelling, photography, and fashion.[5] In the era of music television, both Boy George and Michael Jackson make louder *scenes* as Boy-Girls.

Rather than diminishing his phallic power, or amplifying it via a

5   Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (New York Marion Boyars, 1986)

contrast with weakness, female coding inserts additional strength into the She-man The male body's 'staying power' remains unchallenged by feminine dress, makeup and gestures which, in media, have become one and the same with female sexuality. More indexical than symbolic, the feminine costume utilizes conventions of spatial and temporal contiguity to actually deliver its referent. Much as the bulge in Tim Curry's corset indexes his male sex, the determined geometry of his bra and garters bestows a female anatomy on him The power of the She-man, then, is expressly sexual.

## Origins of the She-man

### Sexuality in male and female images

An obvious question now arises as to the origins of this feminine power Is not the phallus the dominant signifier, which defines woman by her lack? Is not the penis the dominant sexual signifier, reigning by virtue of a proclaimed anatomical visibility (which nevertheless remains hidden in media except for pornography's privileged ejaculation shot) that supports its own invisible visibility with an exaggerated persona – the Freudian phallic symbol?

Writing about second generation Victorian women who were presumed to be empty of sexuality, Esther Newton has argued that male clothing served as a means for women to proclaim their *de facto* sexuality

> The bourgeois woman's sexuality proper was confined to its reproductive function; the uterus was its organ But as for lust, 'the major current in Victorian sexual ideology declared that women were passionless and asexual, the passive objects of male sexual desire . ' Sex was seen as phallic, by which I mean that, conceptually, sex could only occur in the presence of an imperial and imperious penis [6]

6 Esther Newton The Mythic Mannish Lesbian Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman , *Signs* vol 9, no 4 (1984) p 561 Newton s internal quote is cited by her as George Chauncey Fr , 'From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance *Salmagundi*, nos 58/59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983), pp 114–45, esp 117

Thus the signification of sexuality was under male control Ironically, women had to declare/display their own active libidos through male clothing codes

How then is the contemporary She-man sexually empowered by female coding? How did female imagery come to signify sexuality and power? Since the Victorian age, major shifts in sexual positions have occured, partly as a result of sexology, sexual liberation, and the feminist and gay movements Whether 'on our backs' or 'off our backs', our female sexual responses and desires are now seen as powerful No longer only feared, female sexuality is envied.

Ironically, cinema's sexual imaging of woman is also partly responsible for making possible a representation of femaleness as sexual power Following a long history of visual representations that

established woman's body as the conventional marker of sexual difference, cinema made this body the carrier of sexuality in both the film's visuals and narrative. Woman's image became the visible site of sexuality that was obtained by the male hero, i.e , male sexuality was projected onto, represented by, and obtainable through her body. Although quite different than the Victorian woman who announced her sexuality via the male image, woman's 'sexual' image in classical cinema similarly potentiated an involuted image of sexual power

The most forceful paradigms for active female sexuality – which deconstruct involution and assert realignment – are found in contemporary women's performance art where artists boldly expose their bodies for purposes of direct address. Such bodily discourse constructs both a new 'speaking subject' position and an aesthetics of female sexual presence  Two concepts relating to the She-man's origin can be narrativized  In practice, however, the two seem inseparable. The first is the story of the phallic femme which evolves from the feminine masquerade; the second story is that of the Medusan femme which evolves from the female body. These are the two powers that are appropriated by the She-man and merge in his/ her signifying formation. Feminism and feminist artists, rather than popular culture and She-men performers, must be credited for this empowerment of the feminine

### The phallic femme
A first narrative might be that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, second-wave feminists (in dress-for-success suits) abandoned 'femininity', disrupting feminine signification to steal the phallus, which, soon afterwards, they laterally passed on to self-conscious feminist femmes (in leather miniskirts). Thus they created, via a process quite the reverse of fetishism, the phallic-femme whose phallus was locked into a revived feminine mode of signification. To steal it back, the male performer now assumes a post-feminist drag. When successful, he becomes the She-man, his phallic power marked in the feminine.

Early in the present feminist era, Lynda Benglis attacked the art world's discrimination against women with a self-portrait in *Artforum* (December 1974) in which she 'props' a dildo onto her nude body. Thus she effectively identified the phallus as the basic qualification for artistic success and explicitly collapsed the phallus with the penis – via body/object/photo collage art

Now, in the 'post-feminist' era,[7] women spike their hair to match their heels, a generation of daughters dons fifties pink lipstick to 'talk back' to the silence imposed on their mothers, crosses hang purple from ears instead of pearl from necks – i e , skirts are worn (and torn) self-reflexively  Now, when a male character stalks the

7  By using this term post feminist' I do not wish to imply that we have given up on or moved past feminism Rather with its permeation throughout American culture it is now possible for feminist practice to be taken for granted and feminist thought quoted as rhetoric When dogma approaches kitsch perhaps only humour provides the necessary distance and self-reflexivity to combat stasis

Lynda Benglis 'Posed with
instrument'
photo © 1974, Arth-Gordon
(Courtesy of Lynda Benglis)

night 'as a woman' the effect is not a classic comedy of misidentity,
but a drama of the phallic prostitute – the gigolo.

In 'Film and the Masquerade', Mary Ann Doane describes the
feminine masquerade as a distancing device.

> The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance.
> Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The
> masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore
> lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as
> presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic. The transvestite adopts
> the sexuality of the other – the woman becomes a man in order to

attain the necessary distance from the image Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image . ..

The very fact that we can speak of a woman 'using' her sex or 'using' her body for particular gains is highly significant – it is not that a man cannot use his body in this way but that he doesn't have to The masquerade doubles representation; it is constituted by a hyperbolisation of the accoutrements of femininity.[8]

8 Mary Ann Doane 'Film and the Masquerade Theorising the Female Spectator Screen vol 23 nos 3–4 (1982), pp 81–2

Through an excess of femininity, then, woman stands back from her image in order to read it better. The pertinent question to this discussion is where does woman's 'sexuality' reside in this improbable separation – in the cultural construction of femininity which she now consciously manipulates as a 'persona', or in some nature within her but beyond her reading? This question parallels the situation of women in language. Can women better speak by parodying patriarchal language (Benglis's phallic femme), or by narrating their own sexual bodies (the Medusan femme)?

### The Medusan femme
A second process, which can be postulated to explain the feminine power that the She-man usurps, spans this distance between culture and nature. Vagina envy, as evidenced in some She-men, suggest that female sexuality is challenging the phallus's position as the dominant signifier. In her early feminist performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), Carolee Schneemann defended the suitability of personal experience as material for art by reading a 'diary' scroll (with)drawn from her vagina.[9] Thus she asserted the female body to be a producer of meaning

9 A photograph of this performance can be found in Moira Roth (ed ), The Amazing Decade Women and Performance Art in America 1970–1980 (Los Angeles Astro Arts 1983) p 15

Female sexuality is now neither simply the sign of lack, as Laura Mulvey has identified it, inciting castration anxiety and thus necessitating fetishization and narrative punishment, nor a generator of signs within Levi-Strauss's parameters [10] It is rather a primary signifier erupting into culture like a volcano in the suburbs Like the laughing Medusa, described by Helene Cixous,[11] who haughtily displays her sex to men's horrified reactions, the Medusan femme provides a paradigm for an empowering bodily address Furthermore, this 'imagined' figure exerts a specifically feminine body-signifying process – a multiplying, questioning, digressing, fragmenting language that corresponds to the indefinable plurality of female sexuality spread over a woman's body – described by Luce Irigaray

10 See Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Screen vol 16 no 3 (1975) pp 6–18 and Claude Levi-Strauss The Raw and the Cooked, trans John and Doreen Weightman (New York Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975)

11 Woman writing her sexual body is a thematic concern throughout Helene Cixous s work See 'The Laugh of the Medusa in Elaine Marks and Isabelle Courtivron (eds ), New French Feminisms (New York Schocken Books, 1981) and 'Castration or Decapitation' trans Annette Kuhn, Signs 7 no 1 (1981) pp 41–55

So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones Indeed she has many more Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further it

is *plural*. Is this the way culture is seeking to characterize itself now?    .

*[W]oman has sex organs more or less everywhere.* She finds pleasure almost anywhere  Even if we refrain from invoking the hystericization of her entire body, the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined – in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness   .  .

Thus what [women] desire is precisely nothing, and at the same time everything. Always something more and something else besides that *one* – sexual organ, for example – that you give them, attribute to them  Their desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole. Whereas it really involves a different economy more than anything else, one that upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse    .[12]

Finally rebelling against the symbolic order, contemporary sexual culture demands a 'plural' sight/site that can be seen *and* felt  The phallus, a mere abstraction which hides the organ which might go limp, is a holdover from the Victorian age  Today's Medusan femme expresses her sexuality with her entire body, spreading and kicking her legs to join the postmodern laughter

**Female authorship and male exhibitionism in musical performance.**
In 'Form and Female Authorship in Music Video', Lisa Lewis has written about the opportunity afforded to female musicians by the music video form. Not only does their singing role suggest authorship and assign narrative importance to them, but they are able via performance strategies to express gender-specific attitudes or viewpoints  She states

Female musicians are actively participating in making the music video form work in their interest, to assert their authority as producers of culture and to air their views on female genderhood  The generic emphasis in music video on using the song as a soundtrack, together with the centrality of the musician's image in the video, formally support the construction of female authorship   .

Many female musicians have proved to be quite adept at manipulating elements of visual performance in their video act, thereby utilizing music video as an additional authorship tool  In 'What's Love Got To Do With It?', the gestures, eye contact with the camera and with other characters, and the walking style of Tina Turner add up to a powerful and aggressive on-screen presence [13]

This new visual music format requires specific performance talents

**12** Luce Irigaray *This Sex Which Is Not One* trans Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca Cornell University Press 1985) pp 23–33

**13** Lisa Lewis  Form and Female Authorship in Music Video  Caren Deming and Samuel Becker (eds ) *Media in Society Readings in Mass Communication* (Glenview IL Scott Foresman and Company 1988) pp 140 143

from male musicians as well As Richard Goldstein states in 'Tube Rock How Music Video Is Changing Music', they have to learn to communicate with their bodies

> Tube rock forces musicians to act. Not that they haven't been acting since Jerry Lee Lewis learned to stomp on a piano and Chuck Berry essayed his first duckwalk; but on MTV, musicians have to emote the way matinee idols once did if they're to establish the kind of contact tube rockers covet – the heightened typology of a classic movie star. What once made a rock performer powerful – the ability to move an arena with broad gesture and precision timing – has been supplanted by a new strategy the performer must project in close-up.[14]

Because of their different relations to bodily expression, then, females and males have adjusted differently to the music video form. While MTV's emphasis on body and presence seems to have provided women performers an avenue for gaining authorship, males have attempted to 'master' the facial expression of sensuality as well as the language of exhibitionism, efforts which have themselves recast gender and asked new questions about sexuality. As Simon Frith writes in *Music for Pleasure*,

> The most important effect of gender-bending was to focus the problem of sexuality onto males In pop, the question became, unusually, what do men want? And as masculinity became a packaging problem, then so did masculine desire . . . On video, music can be mediated through the body directly [15]

These passages from three authors suggest that the music video form has produced new positions for both female and male performers. These repositionings often result in ambiguous reversals, such as that evident in two Bananarama videos, 'I Can't Help It' and 'Love in the First Degree' In each video, the three female vocalists sing in the first person, to the camera/viewers as well as to a male 'you' within the fictional performance space In each, the male body is exploited as visual object at the same time as lyrics admit female dependency 'I can't help it', Bananarama sings as a shirtless male dances. 'I'm captivated by your honey Move your body I need you. I won't give up'. Similarly, as a group of males dance in prison-striped briefs and crop-tops, the 'fully dressed' female Bananarama trio sings, 'Only you can set me free'. As one of these singers shakes a dancer's head and then pushes him away, they continue, 'cause I'm guilty of love in the first degree'. The men's bare legs contrast strikingly with the women's covered legs The number ends with the men down on their hands and knees

This 'nouveau' reversal of subjectivity and exhibitionism between female and male performers incorporates ambiguity to satisfy multiple audience identifications and desires. When the She-man

14 Richard Goldstein, 'Tube Rock How Music Video is Changing Music' Caren Deming and Samuel Becker (eds ), *Media in Society Readings in Mass Communication* (Glenview, IL Scott, Foresman and Company 1988), pp 50–1

15 Simon Frith, *Music for Pleasure* (Cambridge, ENG Polity Press, 1988), pp 166 167

collects all this ambiguity on 'his' body, subjectivity and exhibitionism reverberate in a contradictory assemblage of gender and sexual codes In this case the male performer adopts sexualised female body language to achieve a powerful exhibitionistic subjectivity

### The She-man: displacing the heterosexual narrative

What happens, then, when the male – metaphoric possessor of the dominant, if out-of-style, signifier – exercises his prerogative to appropriate the phallic femme's masquerade or the Medusan body? He finds himself a split personality, a schizophrenic sign, a media image combining disbelief and an aesthetic of his-teric, richocheting signifiers – a She-man, whose sexual power depends not on the ostensibly stable male body but on embraced incongruity He finds himself the site of a nervous breakdown, the utter collapse of the most basic structuring device, i e male/female binary opposition, into postmodern irrelevance.

The She-man's performance engulfs and rewrites the conventional heterosexual narrative, suturing the viewer into unending alterations of absence and presence, desire and pleasure. First we see a woman Where's the man? Then we see a man. Where's the woman? Simultaneously we are given the pleasures of reading conventionally and subverting convention. The woman is the man. The She-man is the shot-reverse shot Performance is the nouveau narrative

### The postmodern She-man in postmodern video

### The video medium: modernist concerns

The particularly postmodern sexual imagery of the She-man is especially prevalent in youth music culture. Ironically, a discussion of the She-man in music videos and video art calls for a return to modernist concerns For two reasons, the video medium is especially suitable for the She-man's scheme. Historically, video art has shown an affinity with performance art, perhaps because of what Rosalind Krauss called the medium's property of narcissism [16] Secondly, as Douglas Davis has pointed out, the experience of viewing the small video monitor contains its own particular physicality that seems appropriate for performance [17]

Rather than being swept away by film's large screen, video viewers maintain a sense of their own physicality. Instead of identifying with some larger-than-life idealized (Lacanian) 'mirror' image, video viewers experience the medium's (McLuhanesque) tactility, or its subtle existentialism as Davis describes it When they do use it as a mirror, as Krauss suggests, it is not to mistake themselves for ideal images, but to check their makeup

Video's mobile viewers, whether in their living rooms or in dance bars, are less likely to feel that they are dreaming than cruising

16 Rosalind Krauss Video The Aesthetics of Narcissism in Gregory Battock (ed ) New Artists Video (New York E P Dutton 1978), pp 43–64

17 Douglas Davis, Filmgoing/ Videogoing Making Distinctions in Artculture Essays on the Post-modern (New York Harper and Row Publishers 1977) pp 79–84

Video music especially benefits from the viewing logistics of the medium, engaging viewers in a physical/rhythmic identification. Rather than an empty vessel for emphatic identification, the performer is a surrogate dance partner. Very often this is reinforced by a performance aesthetics of movement – the artist's continual movement interacts with and against the editing and camera movement [18]

18  A good example of this is the Communards 'Never Can Say Good-bye' in which constant sweeping camera movements 'bring' viewers to the singers/stars, and swirling camera movements incorporate both stars and viewers into a large group of dancers The stars are both centre and part of the dynamic social group This accomplishes a live and let live solidarity in which it no longer matters if one is gay or straight as long as he/she can dance (The Communards are openly gay the diegetic audience is composed primarily of heterosexual couplings though the rapid pace achieved by cinematography and editing fragments this )

### She-man constructions in video artworks and music videos

An examination of several independent video artworks and commercial music videos will demonstrate the above ideas  A variety of ways in which She-men appropriate the female can be enumerated by focusing on performance and bodily imagery rather than narrative or music.

John Scarlett-Davis's *A Trip Through the Wardrobes of the Mind* (5 minutes, colour, 1983, U.K ) displays gender bending as a *style* played out in dress, hair style, gestures, and the body. Sex is essentially coopted by style, resulting in the sexy rather than the sexual. A series of characters in a gender-range of fashions strike poses and perform dances while glancing at the camera/audience  A young man in a black leather vest kisses the tattoo on his shoulder. Another young man in a skirt paints a triangle on his stomach.

In John Greyson's *The Kipling Trilogy: Perils of Pedagogy* (5 minutes, colour, 1984, Canada), the 'female's' position as object of the erotic gaze is appropriated by a young male character who flounts himself exhibitionistically before the camera and another character – his male mentor. This implies a connection between the desire usually directed at women and a desire directed at both male and female youth. In a typically gay pantomime, this boy appropriates a woman's voice, assisted technologically as her song ('To Sir With Love') is slowed down to lower the pitch. Similarly, by camera positioning, the boy is turned on his side, i.e , technologically 'laid'

In Richard Fung's *Chinese Characters* (21 minutes, colour, 1986, Canada), the male artist video-keys himself into a clip from a pornographic film where he poses as the lure for a desiring stud  His presence as both performer and character constructs two different identificatory positions for us  Elsewhere in the tape, he tells how he learned to make appropriate sounds during sex by listening to women in porn movies. A generic emphasis on the porn stud's large penis is juxtaposed with the artist/character's emphatic fondling of his own nipples  Hardcore pornography is the only genre that consistently shows the penis. Its convention of large penises can be 'seen' as an attempt to uphold the phallus in the realm of the physical. Performance and technology collaborate in this tape to

The Kipling Trilogy: Perils of
Pedagogy (Gregson, USA, 1984)
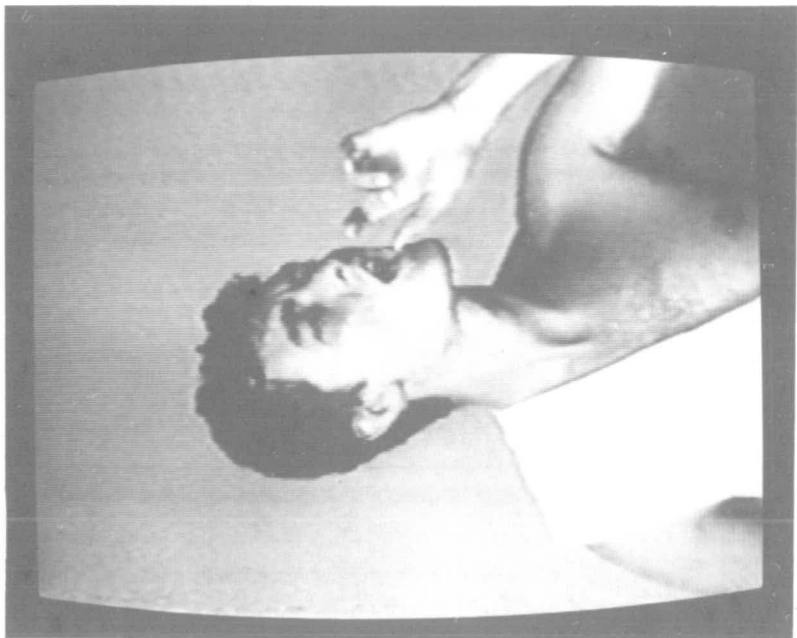


Chinese Characters (Fung,
Canada, 1986)

create a She-man whose breasts are the visual equivalent of the porn star's 'cock'.

In his music video 'Boys keep Swinging', David Bowie appears as lead singer as well as (in drag) three backup female singers. As a man he sings, 'Nothing stands in your way when you're a boy. . . . Other boys check you out. . . . You get a girl. . . . Boys keep swinging. Boys always work it out'. As the female chorus, he echoes himself with, 'Boys!' The video ends, not on the handsome Bowie in suit and tie, but with each of the three female singers walking forward on a stage. The first two dramatically remove their wigs and smear their lipstick with the backs of their hands as if attempting to wipe it off. The third is an older female character who walks slowly with a cane. Rather than following the actions of the other two, she blows a kiss to the camera/audience, thus ensuring an open ending to this already ambiguous declaration about gender.

In the music video 'Walk Like a Man', Divine achieves the most complete gender/sexual transformation – via costume, makeup, gestures, and look 'suggestive' of Mae West.[19] As Divine stands on a wagon/car singing, swinging, and whipping her imaginary horses, the camera places viewers in the position of the missing horses. Combined with the video medium's maintenance of the viewer's physicality, this situates them well for her whipping. The diegetic audience encourages viewers to 'join in' the song, yet when we do, we enter into camp S&M theatre.

The examples of appropriation in these video works demonstrate a tentative collapse of the phallic femme and the Medusan femme on the male body. Female sexuality originally carried either by the

19 Parker Tyler raises the interesting question of who is imitating whom between Mae West and the drag queen 'Miss West's reaction to comments that connected her with female impersonators . . . was reported as the boast that, of course, she 'knew that female impersonators imitated her'. It is often hard, as everyone knows, to establish primacy of claims to originality, whether actually asserted or only indicated statistically Perhaps one ought simply to say that Miss West's style as a woman fully qualifies her – as it always did – to be a Mother Superior of the Faggots' (Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes Homosexuality in the Movies* [New York Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972], p. 1) This question is quite relevant to my evaluation of the She-man (in the conclusion of this paper) as a new and separate entity that transcends/abandons any original male agency.



*Divine in Walk Like a Man*

masquerade or by the body abandons these boundaries to slip back and forth between the male body and his masquerade, constantly threatening to engulf and dissolve him. For example, Divine's costume is a masquerade that generates a womb on/in his/her body.

Interestingly, a trace of masculinity is deliberately maintained in all these works, as if this threatened engulfment necessitates the shy penis to peek out: Under his dress, the man in *A Trip Through the Wardrobes of the Mind* wears pants. In *Perils of Pedagogy*, the penis of the flirting, feminized boy is once shown and once indexed by a bulge in his undershorts. The eroticization of nipples supplements rather than displaces the 'masculinized' anatomy of the 'well-endowed' porn star in *Chinese Characters*. Though triply female, Bowie's drag personas ostensibly serve to back up the real Bowie – the *GQ* male. As Divine swings her hips, a cut-in shot briefly focuses on a male masturbatory gesture she enacts with horses reins.

It can be argued that via mechanisms of 'the look', the young male (gigolo) in *Perils of Pedagogy* is 'womanized'. Furthermore, his receiving body is emphasized when he points at his open mouth and turns over to offer his ass. However, these receiving gestures are balanced by the presence of the penis. This co-presence, or balance, creates the internal distance which establishes his image as bi-sexed rather than transsexual. This internal distance insures both masculinity and femininity.

Divine's very corporality, the accenting of her stomach by the 'outline' design of her costume, tends to posit the woman in his/her body. By not showing his/her anatomy, he moves his image from transvestite to transsexual. The rapid editing between different subject-camera distances mimics a *fort-da* game, which, combined
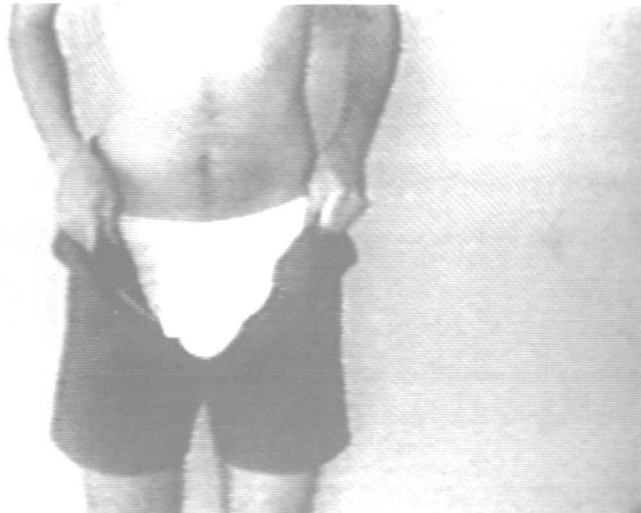


*The Kipling Trilogy: Perils of Pedagogy* (Gregson, USA, 1984)

20 See Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's
Seduction: Feminism and
Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca Cornell
University Press, 1982) for an
elaboration of the concept of
phallic mother.

with her whipping action, suggests Divine also as the phallic mother
in relation to the audience.[20]

Examples of She-man imagery in several additional music videos
will further demonstrate the construction of this bi-sexed figure. In
Dead or Alive's 'Save You All My Kisses', the lead (male) singer
appears extremely androgynous but emanates a distinctly feminine
sexual energy. This sexuality is both emphasized and kept separate
by a silver codpiece prominently shown during a vertical track up
his/her body. Also signalling maleness is his Adam's apple.
Coexisting female signals include his/her dominatrix whip and long,
obviously styled hair. Dressed in black leather jacket and tights, he/
she walks, dances, and sings in front of a wire fence while a gang of
boys climb the fence attempting to get at him/her. Their enthusiastic
approach displays much ambivalence – they seem both attracted to
and repelled by him/her. At times their postures and glances seem
to signify lust, but at other times they seem to be mocking him/her.
While one holds and swings his baseball bat in a way that threatens
a fag-bashing, another rips open his t-shirt as if stripping for him/
her. A male alter-ego is also present, also dressed in black leather
and resembling his female counterpart except that he wears more
masculine pants, presents a more masculine posture, and carries a
baseball bat. Again it is unclear whether he is attracted to 'her' or
threatening to attack 'her'. The contradictory reactions of this
diegetic audience emphasize and confirm the She-man as
simultaneously female and male.

It should be noted that, although gay audiences may have more to
gain from the She-man's radical display of gender *and* sex
constructions, the She-man is not a gay figure, nor an effeminate
male, nor a hermaphrodite. The She-man, as enacted by both gay

Mike Monroe, Hanoi Rocks

and straight performers, is a fully functional figuration signifying woman/man.

This uncompromising ambiguity of the She-man, created by simultaneous female and male presence, also exists in Mike Monroe of Hanoi Rocks. During a performance of 'Taxi Driver', he seems to combine two sexes without neutralizing them. As he performs both male and female gestures – in makeup and androgynous clothing – a doubling of sexes occurs which increases sexuality and produces a bi-sexed rather than bisexual image.

In 'Cry and Be Free', Marilyn uses cross-gender movements – a sort of Barbra Streisand positioning of head and shoulders – that epitomize her progression of the masquerade beyond costume and makeup to gestures and posturing. This is a progression which is basic to the She-man's 'upgrading' of transvestism from gender-crossing to sex-crossing. The eroticization of Marilyn's bare male breasts by movements of reclining and arching in combination with 'her' female-coded diverted glances make visual the concept of a woman in a man's body.

Finally, Swans' video 'A Screw' uses a split screen and mirrored imagery to produce a receptive openness in a male body, particularly at the sites of mouth, abdomen and buttocks. The vagina imagery made obvious in 'A Screw' is also hinted at in some other of the video artworks and music videos discussed here, e.g., in *A Trip Through the Wardrobes of the Mind*, when the young male paints a triangle on his bare stomach. Like Divine in 'Walk Like a Man', the She-man in 'A Screw' creates a womb on/in his body; however the *Videodrome*-like vaginal imagery here has a rougher aggressivity than that created by Divine's frilly dress.

Marilyn in *Cry and Be Free*

## Conclusion: can we do it too?

In *The Desire to Desire*, an analysis of 1940s women's films, Mary Ann Doane identifies proper makeup and dress as indicators of a woman's stable narcissism.[21] Should that makeup be smeared or that dress torn, the woman is marked with the pathetic condition of impaired narcissism – either too much self-love, or the audacious desiring (otherising) of another.

Narcissism becomes quite different, however, when two sexes are present in the same body – which can signal both heterosexual coupling and bisexuality. When Mike Monroe sweats through his makeup, it seems like a return of the male and signals a *successful* narcissism. Doane has argued a predilection in women for tactility and overidentification, in contrast to men's affinity to voyeurism and fetishism which both require distance.[22] By invalidating the concept of distance as separation, Mike Monroe's narcissistically bi-sexed figure makes overidentification a mute point.

21 Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987)

22 See Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade' and *The Desire to Desire*

Psycho-sexologists have long referred to penis envy in women and described women's clitoris as an undeveloped penis Women have been positioned alongside boys, their 'lack' diminishing them and disqualifying them for adulthood. Traditionally, when crossdressing, they achieved boyishness rather than manliness.

The obvious question for future investigation on this subject is is there a complementary bi-sexed figure, a reverse of the She-man, built from woman's body and man's masquerade? I think not Because female sexuality is conventionally imaged and indexed by the female masquerade, and because the male 'costume' conventionally serves to mask rather than index male (genital) sexuality, there is no appropriation mechanism by which a 'he-woman' could be produced via masquerade alone Even more than the She-man's use of gesture to make transvestism physical, the incorporation of action is essential for a woman performer's successful sex crossing In order to construct an empowerment and achieve a transgression similar to those of the She-man, women would need to entirely disrupt the *men act* and *women appear* sex roles described by John Berger.[23] In short, without also appropriating 'male action', women's transvestism fails to achieve the double sexuality of the She-man.

**23** John Berger, et al *Ways of Seeing* (London British Broadcasting Corporation 1972) p 47

The portrait of Madonna which appeared on the cover of the June 1990 issue of *Interview* magazine successfully employs reversal, contradiction, *and action* to disrupt gender and sex Wearing dark lipstick, exaggerated eyelashes, fishnet stockings, hot pants, and a polka-dotted blouse with bell-shaped collar and cuffs, Madonna thrusts forward her pelvis, grabs her crotch, and squeezes her thigh muscle in a gesture that young men often use playfully to suggest a gigantic-sized penis. Madonna's 'girlish' clowning around both mocks machismo and use of the penis. By plagiarizing a male fantasy, she ironically reassigns and complicates penis envy

Annie Lennox of Eurythmics deliberately recalls/retains the female masquerade, when crossdressing, via her bright red lipstick – which, even on young girls, signals adult female sexuality. This lipstick sexualizes her image while her *act* of wearing a suit (rather than the mere presence of a suit) pushes it towards a bi-sexed image Her assertive masculine behaviour – speech, gestures. and posture – 'invests' the suit with transgressive power Similarly, when Lily Tomlin impersonates her character Tommy Velour, a working class, Italian nightclub singer, 'her' sexual come-ons to 'girls' in the audience validate and sexualize the hair on 'his' chest. These sexual actions make Tomlin's act more transgressive than the image of Katharine Hepburn wearing a false moustache in *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935, George Cukor) or Julie Andrews wearing a suit in *Victor/Victoria* (1982, Blake Edwards)

Woman's 'counterpart' to the She-man would likely require appropriation of male sexual prerogatives in two areas/actions First,

she needs to trespass the boundaries of sexual segregation relating to pornography and sexual information, erotica, expression of libido, and sexual joking. (Here we might think of Mae West as groundbreaking.) Second, she must aggressively expose the untamed sexual imagery of her body For instance, her unruly mature pubic hair contrasts sharply with the image of female genitals in conventional pornography, where shaving or partially shaving pubic hair converts a physical characteristic into masquerade and constructs an (agist) image of feminine youth. Instead of a he-woman, this transgressive figure might better be termed the 'She-butch' In contrast to the She-man's image-actions (actions on images), the She-butch would perform action-images (images containing action).

Indeed, it is from the arena of avant-garde performance that the She-butch will likely emerge Following the taboo-breaking work of performance artists such as Lynda Benglis and Carolee Schneemann Karen Finley appropriates male prerogatives in her 'id-speak' performances. Dirty talk/dirty acts such as 'I Like to Smell the Gas Passed from your Ass', 'I'm an Ass Man', and 'Don't Hang the Angel' use the language of pornography for radical 'feminine' misbehaviour.[24] Another ripe for action figure, which I have termed the 'nouveau lesbian butch', is the contemporary lesbian who self-consciously deconstructs/constructs the male body via transgressive sexual prostheses and practices.[25] Whether such avant-garde/ underground trangressions will ever be reflected in mainstream culture (as the She-man is to a limited degree) will no doubt depend on economic determinants as well as on the media's ability to negotiate/package the She-butch's sexual subjectivity in a way that doesn't directly challenge society's prevailing concept of passive/ image/woman

Currently, the She-man is the most transgressive signifier of sexuality in play, evident in popular music culture as well as underground film and experimental video. This figure suggests the collapse of the phallus as the dominant signifier and its replacement by a new empowered female sexuality which cannot be reduced to boyishness Such evidence of the phallic femme's effectivity and the Medusan femme's signifying power signals a She-butch on the horizon/edge Although he/she is him/herself an obvious result of male prerogative, the She-man's dependency on female sexuality for his/her power is also obvious. More importantly, the She-man disrupts the very concept of male-female discontinuity Via his/her appropriations of femininity, the She-man not only achieves a postmodern dismantling of gender and sex differences but also adopts a *greater* sexuality.

24 C Carr, Unspeakable Practices Unnatural Acts The Taboo Art of Karen Finley *The Village Voice* 24 June 1986 pp 17–20
25 Chris Straayer 'The Lesbian Butch Image Appropriation or Intervention unpublished paper presented at the 1990 Society for Cinema Studies Conference

# Sonny's virtues: the gender negotiations of *Miami Vice*

## SCOTT BENJAMIN KING

1 Lawrence Grossberg The In-Difference of Television', *Screen*, Vol 28, No 2 (1987), pp 28–45

2 Todd Gitlin, 'We Build Excitement in Todd Gitlin (ed ) *Watching Television* (New York Pantheon Books, 1987), pp 136–161

3 See, for example Todd Gitlin *Inside Prime Time* (New York Pantheon Books 1983)

4 See for example Lawrence Grossberg *It s a Sin Essays on Postmodernism Politics and Culture* (Sydney Power Publications 1988)

FOR many critics, *Miami Vice* reigns as the televisual pinnacle of postmodernism It is a show about its own look, whose perceived lack of storyline marks a new stage in a period where only the surface can or even should be known Lawrence Grossberg's 'The In-Difference of Television'[1] and Todd Gitlin's 'We Build Excitement'[2] thus use the 'shallowness' of *Miami Vice* as a springboard to diagnose contemporary culture as surface obsessed, as a collection of fragmented, unlocatable meanings In this paper I want to read *Miami Vice* through Grossberg's and Gitlin's eyes in order to question the masculinist bias inherent in much postmodern criticism. I'm taking Grossberg and Gitlin as symptomatic writers precisely because as American television theorists their agenda and foci are apparently so different. Gitlin is a left-wing sociologist who roots media meanings in the empirical processes of capitalist cultural production [3] Grossberg is a leading representative of the 'cultural studies' wing of American communications theory, drawing on a variety of European accounts of symbolic power [4] Yet their approaches to *Miami Vice* are remarkably similar Both use the show's supposed lack of narrative to stand for the 'threat' of postmodern culture For Gitlin, *Miami Vice* represents the possibility of a future without connected human emotions, for Grossberg the programme reveals the instability of meaning

Todd Gitlin's work explores postmodern culture through the metaphor of what he calls the Lone Driver This Driver is a version of the American rugged individual, the solitary hero bravely facing the conflicts he is handed easily and alone What makes this figure

relevant to the postmodern era that Gitlin is discussing is the way that the Lone Driver is now a myth constructed by and linked to contemporary capitalism, an icon that Gitlin sees to excess in the car commercials that vicariously fulfill the fantasy of independence in the act and the metaphor of driving  Gitlin speculates on the relevance of this fantasy to its target audience, which he describes as 'middle managers' to whom the myth of lone driving provides a release from the oppressive feelings of actual interdependence and subservience to the hierarchies of the workplace. He argues that Sonny Crockett, the character whose adventures are central to *Miami Vice*, embodies this fantasy perfectly in the way his character is shown to be impenetrable; his obsession with image isolates him and makes him the Lone Driver *par excellence*  For Gitlin, the plotlessness of *Miami Vice*, the fact that 'everything happens for the sake of display'[5] reinforces the element of postmodernism described by Jameson as the 'waning of affect',[6] where the obsession with surfaces leads to a total disconnection from feeling, a separation from reality that is so far-reaching that even the word real must be placed in quotes

Grossberg's essay takes a less specifically critical approach, attempting to incorporate film, cultural and postmodern theory into an accurate articulation of television's operation within a variety of contexts  With *Miami Vice* we are presented with a show where 'the narrative is less important than the images',[7] where the show's own ironic stance makes it resistant to any absolute definition. We are encouraged by Grossberg then, to see all television, and perhaps even other forms of culture, as signs that we drive past on the road, where meaning is found in what he calls the process of in-difference, created by notions that are themselves indifferent to difference, disconnected from any central, absolute meaning or source. Grossberg sees meaning on television as ultimately fragmented, confused, both within the irony and self-reflexivity of the texts themselves, and the actual process of watching, which, unlike film, involves any number of states of attention  Though he clearly mocks *Miami Vice* as a 'forensic fashion show',[8] Grossberg is ultimately not so much critical of this postmodern condition as he is convinced of its unlocatability within any conventional field of meaning  His point is well-taken in the sense that absolute definitions and interpretations of television affects and effects have become impossible, but his approach ignores the possibility of a solid understanding of the 'coincidences' in culture that arise and intersect on many levels, both in a given show (*Miami Vice*) and then inside a complex method of understanding (postmodernism). These coincidences are not accidents, but recurring structures that point, in this case, to the changing modalities of the male code, to the learning and the reinforcing what it means to be a man

Grossberg, in short, like Gitlin misses the factors that do connect

5  Todd Gitlin 'We Build Excitement' p 152

6  Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in *New Left Review* no 146 (July–August 1984) p 61

7  Lawrence Grossberg 'The In-Difference of Television', p 29

8  Ibid

*Miami Vice* to a stable interpretation, factors which are the programme's gender politics. This is not to say that either writer is wrong about *Miami Vice*, or that by 'accurately' re-interpreting the show I can somehow disprove their claims. I do believe, though, that a closer examination of the show and its descriptions reveals a bias that is buried at the heart of postmodern critiques, a fear of the feminized man, a fear of, to use Vito Russo's term, the 'sissy'.[9]

9  For a fuller discussion of the 'sissy' in both its history and its relation to gender politics, see Vito Russo. *The Celluloid Closet* (New York  Harper & Row. 1987)

## Looks

It is hard to argue with the supposition that display for display's sake is an issue that *Miami Vice* and the media around it emphasize constantly; the catch phrase, 'no earth tones', purportedly Michael Mann's formula for the success of the show, turns up in almost every description, review, and re-working of the show in the many media that follow wherever *Vice* goes (in *TV Guide*, *Newsweek*, as a quip, in the 1986 Saturday morning *New Chipmunks* obligatory parody of the show). The phrase is used in both Gitlin's and Grossberg's articles to 'prove' the fascination that the show has with image. Yet this concentration is not new or unique for television. *Moonlighting*, *Mike Hammer*, and modern commercials all revolve around display – female display. Historically speaking, *Charlie's Angels* is a terrific example of a show whose plots were designed around costume changes (the angels go undercover as fashion models, at a health spa, by the swimming pool). The obvious difference between *Charlie's Angels* and *Miami Vice* is the gender difference of the protagonists; this time the male is the mannequin. After years of female display designed for the (male) viewer, the man is now in the televisual showcase. Sonny's status as a clothes hanger is defined not only by the programme (with its lingering shots of him in full body, in close-up) but by the hype and the critiques that follow *Vice* wherever it goes. Within the definitions of patriarchal culture, Sonny is 'feminized' by his objectification; the cultural gender confusion over the prominence of a *male* model manifests itself physically in Sonny's trademark stubble, which serves to remind us that this pretty displayed human is, counter to our expectations, a man. This is not to say that *Miami Vice* does not visually eroticize female images; the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the show's protagonist do occasionally focus on the display of the female body. Evidence for the choreography of gazes that these looks set up can be found in Sonny's ubiquitous sunglasses, which are his way of being seen and seeing without being seen seeing. Nonetheless, the female characters on the programme are stronger and more complex than the sex objects one usually finds on American television cop shows, as I will relate later. Furthermore, the emphasis of the show lies mostly on Sonny's image, and this



(courtesy of the author)

image's implicit eroticism (visual sexuality) Though this is not the first television 'hunk', it is significantly one of the first instances where a man is defined by the way he looks (is seen) and not the way he looks (sees).

Still, the visual beauty of the show lies not only in the presentation of its main character, but also in its aesthetic construction, its mise-en-scene. The set design, costumes, lighting, composition are carefully constructed for aesthetic 'perfection', a process that both Gitlin and Grossberg point out – Grossberg· '(Michael Mann's) recent suggestion that to change the colour scheme . . is a more radical threat to the programme than the declining quality of the scripts '[10] – Gitlin· 'In *Vice*'s Miami, the players are regularly composed into fashion tableaux (arranged) strictly for their pastel colors, the spaces between them, the way they stand framed in an alleyway or deployed against a wall.'[11] It is fundamental to these arguments that the beauty of an image necessarily makes it empty, that aesthetics somehow signify meaninglessness Yet this beautiful, perfect image has very specific meanings. Take Laura Mulvey's analysis of Von Sternberg's fetishism of frame

> Sternberg produces the ultimate fetish . The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce, she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look.[12]

In Mulvey's example, the frame fetish allows men to watch women without confronting the castration threat that the female connotes. In *Miami Vice*, the object of the gaze, the fetish, is primarily male, and the question becomes, what is the function of this fetish, what is it concealing?

Steve Neale speaks to part of this hidden aspect of desire when he discusses the filmic display of the man in male genre films '(I)n a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked as the erotic component of an another male look; that look must be suppressed '[13] There is no doubt that Sonny is marked erotic, that he is fetishized emphasizes this label For a male viewer (which, not incidentally, is the demographic target of the show's producers, as well as the gender of Gitlin, Grossberg, and a majority of their postmodern counterparts), this could be extremely troubling, not just for the homoerotic implications, but for the 'feminine' position in which this places the male character When describing male genre films, particularly Sergio Leone's westerns, Neale states that through the spectacle of sado-masochistic violence, the male gaze towards other males is de-eroticized, 'We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display.'[14] Sonny, on the other hand, is unabashedly on

10 Grossberg op cit p 30

11 Gitlin op cit p 152

12 Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Phil Rosen (ed), *Narrative Apparatus and Ideology* (New York Columbia University Press, 1986) pp 198–209

13 Steve Neale 'Masculinity as Spectacle *Screen* Vol 24, No 6 (1983) p 8

14 Ibid p 11

display; he is 'feminized' because he is placed and fetishized in a way heretofore 'reserved' (at least in popular culture) for females The disturbing aspects and the threat of this gender role confusion are dealt with partly by Sonny's presence as a fetish (in the spectacle of the show) and then by his deconstruction (in the show's narrative) As theoretical as this frame fetish might seem, one could actually see it operate if a heterosexual male viewer were to say 'Nice shot' instead of 'Cute guy' This repressive process is not necessarily one in which Grossberg or Gitlin are engaged, but their mutual insistence that a beautiful image is ultimately empty, when in fact that image is rich with homoerotic implications, connects their arguments not so much to a logical response to the rapidly encroaching vapidness of culture, than to an irrational and essential male fear.

The male display has other ramifications perhaps even more relevant to critiques of postmodernism, since Sonny's 'feminization' is further enhanced by his position within and among consumer products [15] *Vice* unabashedly focuses on what the characters wear and what they have Sonny is the model in fine clothes, the driver of overpriced cars, the owner of objects in an age fraught with anxiety over conspicuous consumption, as typified by the pervasive iconoclastic resentment of the star/sacrifice of the moment the Yuppie Sonny is clearly a consumer, although the show does explain his object love as a 'cover', something he must do, ironically, for work Presumably we could not expect a man to have all these pretty baubles and actually enjoy them, and there has yet to be an episode in which Sonny shops Nonetheless, the consumptive side of this character is obviously relevant to Gitlin's account of the postmodern threat of a world of exchangeable goods However, he misses another aspect of the empty image that sells an image, one which relates to gender position Griselda Pollock argues that images of women's bodies are used within advertising in such a way that their very presence means that there is something to be bought

> (A) study of the transformation of the female nude in the history of representation does show how the body has come to signify 'sale' . (T)hat which recuperates a bottle of sherry or a car in advertisings from being read as still life with its traditional associations and indicates their status as purchasable commodities, is the presence of woman by virtue of that which the woman introduces into an image [16]

16 Griselda Pollock 'What s wrong with images of women in Rosemary Betterton (ed ), *Looking on Images of femininity in the visual arts and media* (London Pandora, 1987) p 43

Perhaps the most frequently cited definition of the essence of *Vice* is its formal resemblance to advertising – the slickness of its images, its rapid, M T Vesque cutting, an association that Gitlin notes This association, however, requires one more conceptual jump, one that recognizes that the fundamental shift in recent advertising has not

been a new emphasis on a lifestyle made up of images that reflect each other back, or on an unending drive to consume, but instead a metamorphosis more fundamentally threatening, one which has begun to incorporate images of men into the marketplace This change is evident in the print ads for Soloflex, Calvin Klein, et al. which use the beauty of the male body to sell products, to advertise This shift places men in the position of objectification that women have classically occupied and breaks a tradition that is hundreds of years old

## Work

The terrifying prospect that late-capitalist postmodernism represents is a descent into a kind of omnipotent consumption process, where all artistic forms are co-opted and transformed into marketable images *Miami Vice*, in its presentation of a male model associated with product, participates in this process, this time encroaching upon the previously unco-optable male image. Consumption, however, cannot exist in a socioeconomic vacuum, both Gitlin and Grossberg's critiques of this consumptive process are informed by a Marxist perspective, which positions consumption as the product of work within capitalism, creating a dichotomous produce/consume opposition This line is by no means neutral; as Tania Modelski has pointed out, the 'work' side of this binary opposition is associated with maleness, functionality, and production, and the 'consume' side with femaleness and decadence.[17] The interrelatedness of these categories implies that if postmodernism is a crisis of the excess of consumption, and, further, a crisis related to shifting definitions of masculinity, it is also a crisis in the concept of work Todd Gitlin seems aware of this in his discussion of the middle-manager, whose fantasies of individualistic freedom run against the reality of his(sic) situation within the workplace But even within this Marxist perspective neither Gitlin nor Grossberg notice the crisis in the story of work that is endlessly re-told on *Miami Vice*; they instead read the narratives of the show as scant, and meaningless But what seems like a lack of narrative is, in fact, a failed narrative, the insistent story of a man (in this case, Sonny Crockett) unable to 'do his job' This failure acts as a complement to the main character's coming into the image marketplace, for as the man becomes the consumer, which creates its own set of gender conflicts, he is simultaneously faced with a crisis in the category that traditionally removed him from the arena of consumption and defined him as a Man, his work.

*Miami Vice* is a cop show, filled with action, bad guys, guns, car chases and, contrary to the beliefs of its detractors, storylines and plot The action that goes on within the show, perhaps within all

17 Tania Modleski The terror of pleasure, in Tania Modleski, (ed ), *Studies in Entertainment* (Bloomington Indiana University Press 1986), p 155

male-centered shows, is the story of work, of getting the job done One of the functions of the narrative process is a perpetual re-telling of an effort towards an accomplishment, ideologically reinforcing the constructed notions of value and good work that make up the puritan ethic. *Miami Vice* is difficult to discuss in terms of labour because the work being represented is fighting crime and one is at constant risk of confusing the concept of work with the overriding discourse of Law and Order This second discourse typically centres around tales of morality and violence which construct concepts of Otherness having to do with race and insanity, rather than economic circumstances. *Miami Vice*, however, is about a specific kind of crime, drug deals, where the connection of money to immorality is very clear This runs against the grain of conventional cop shows where the criminals are shown to be insane, passionate, monomaniacal, etc On *Vice*, a murder is done for money and the connection of crime to capitalism is incessant. The link that this type of crime has itself to Big Business surfaces in 'The Prodigal Son', a special two-hour episode shot on location in New York, where Sonny and Rico discover that a multinational bank is investing in a drug syndicate They confront the head of this organization, who gives them a lesson in economics, 'Money is a commodity, like oil or water, and American is the best brand there is in the world Now those of us who have it can make more of it by loaning it to those of us who don't. Not so long ago, our bank loaned money to our friends in Latin America Now they aren't going to repay that selling straw bands or clay pots If these Latin borrowers default, we would be decimated And we are America. We are the entire free world. When we sneeze, everybody catches cold'. This character mocks the cops, and, as it turns out in the end, is not arrested, remains untouchable. This is by no means an isolated instance in a show where any wealthy person depicted is automatically a criminal of one sort or the other and under investigation by the vice squad. This is not to say that *Vice* is a radical critique of capitalism, just that it is able to express the crime of money, the anxiety and the criminality that oozes out from the inherent contradictions of capitalism. In the context of this blurring of boundaries, one can keep the connection between work, money, law and crime in mind and so explore Sonny's male identity as seen through his 'performance' as a cop

*Miami Vice* works within the cop show genre and like its endless counterparts (*21 Jump Street, T J Hooker, Hawaii Five-O*), its narratives often revolve around searching for and catching a criminal Very much unlike its counterparts, Sonny is often shown being unable to perform his job The pilot itself begins with a major drug dealer jetting off into the horizon, moments away from Sonny's jurisdiction, as if to set the theme for the episodes to come. In 'Forgive Us Our Debt', Sonny spends the entire show investigating

the possibility that the man who is going to the electric chair for murdering Sonny's partner may be innocent. When he does find such evidence, and the felon is set free, Sonny confronts him only to discover that the evildoer was in fact guilty, and all the evidence that Sonny collected was a well-constructed sham. This show provides a specifically rich insight into the miniature patriarchal crisis – its ending serves as an ironic after thought; it functions only to humiliate and mock Sonny. Nor is this failure an isolated example For the genre that this show belongs to, this is a subversive, almost radical, departure; *Vice* is one of the few shows that allows the criminal to get away Part of what makes these stories so interesting is their theme of male humiliation at work Andrew Tolson argues that masculine identity is tied up in what a man does for a living· 'For every man, the outcome of his socialization is his entry into work . . . Through working, a boy, supposedly, "becomes a man" '.[18] Sonny, in his failure at work, is thus humiliated along strictly masculine definitions There are shows, however, in which this character does succeed at catching criminals, in other words, his failure is not a given. While in one sense, his occasional 'successes' provide the possibility of a positive reaffirmation of work, the contrast between the character's losses and gains, a contrast that comes when watching the show over time as a series, provides an unpredictability in the narrative which in turn creates a contradiction in the subjectivity of the protagonist; he is unable to maintain mastery over his work, a part of his character that defines his cultural masculinity. Whether he will succeed or fail is a question that is often answered only at the end of the show, and it is an outcome over which Sonny himself has no control

Nor is it only the question of success or failure that brings the category of work into question. Even success creates a dilemma for Sonny, who must constantly confront the legitimacy and usefulness of his job. In a powerful and moving episode called 'The Good Collar', Sonny befriends a high-school football star who found it necessary to sell drugs to buy running cleats. Sonny sympathizes with the boy's dream of a college scholarship and has him released, buying the shoes himself. but throwing in a sentimental gift, the football with which Sonny threw a winning pass back in his own college days Meanwhile, Sonny is also trying to bust a fifteen-year old drug kingpin, who will only deal with people under eighteen, for fear of undercover cops Against Sonny's protestation, the young football star volunteers to meet with the kingpin and is killed In the final scene, when Sonny goes back to console the young man's family, they spurn him and return the football Sonny puts it in a nearby trash can and walks away. This is a prime example of the juxtaposition of two classic male discourses, sports and work, both of which are transformed into a humiliation of Sonny's character. When another cop tells Sonny near the end that catching the kingpin

was 'a good collar', it can only be taken as ironic in the face of the waste of human life for which Sonny feels responsible  But despite the constant mockery that the narrative makes of Sonny's job – and there are more examples to follow – Sonny continues on his cynical quest for justice, which, after all these disappointments and agonies, seems to construct Sonny as a character who chooses the pain that his work creates. As I will suggest later, the masochistic position of the main character interlocks carefully with the sadistic position that in some sense the male viewer of *Miami Vice* must occupy

If the validity of work is under scrutiny within this show, so then is the very definition of it. Grossman locates the play of identities between cop and criminal as representative of postmodern irony, the unlocatability of contemporary defined meaning.[19] While I think that this play of identities is in fact largely and perhaps even intentionally present (in 'Viking Bikers from Hell', Tubbs asks Sonny what the difference between 'us' and 'them' is  Sonny replies, 'We shoot straighter'), for me, it functions instead as a question, not only as to what this work does, but as to what this work is. In order to understand what this confusion might suggest, I will look at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth and final season of *Miami Vice*, which specifically focuses on role-blurring  The saga begins in an episode entitled, 'Mirror Image', in which Sonny receives a blow to the head  When he wakes up without his memory and in the presence of his underworld contacts, he believes himself to be Burnett, his undercover and criminal identity  Amnesia is a fairly common narrative device, but in this case Sonny goes psycho, brutally killing three people including a police officer. The ending of this typically episodic (as opposed to serial) show, has Sonny, still under the belief that he is his criminal alter-ego, jet-boating into the horizon, suggesting a complete loss of the male protagonist's control. After waiting six months for the next season (augmented by the television guild's writers' strike), we return to find Sonny an officer in a large criminal empire  He seduces a woman, whom he enlists, in turn, to seduce the brother and the father of the family that runs the empire, turning them against each other. This device is an interesting twist on the *femme fatale*, where the man (Sonny) is shown as the origin of the woman's seductress nature  The episode continues as Sonny plots to become head of the cartel, only to regain his memory. His cop self calls in the police and he arrests his contacts

Though there was a certain amount of tension created in Sonny's complete loss of control, the narrative eventually resolved itself, and the contradictions that the cop as criminal present are seemingly sealed or patched  Yet note the way in which this is done; Sonny succeeds at bringing in and, if necessary, killing criminals and he does so literally by crossing sides  Success at work is tied here not only to the ability to play the criminal, but the inability to know that

19 Grossberg, op cit

one is playing, i.e , by actually *becoming* the criminal; within this narrative, Sonny has lost his memory and along with it, his subjectivity

It is not that I am searching for morals in a television fable, but only noting that the impressions that the show leaves behind are confusing and contradictory, and that the pleasure one derives from it is not despite this fact but because of it. There is confusion over the morality, legality and consequences of work in capitalism, particularly late, information-based capitalism, a confusion reflected in the news media's obsession with insider trading, Donald Trump etc. This confusion carries over into definitions of masculinity on *Vice*, so that to work as a man in this programme involves the difficulty and perhaps even the impossibility of knowing the meaning of what one is doing In gender terms, then, Sonny is problematized along the twin poles of capitalism: on the one hand, he is a beautiful consumer image, a position classically reserved for women, on the other, he is in persistent conflict as to what fundamentally defines him as a man, his work This second conflict, which is an inherent part of the recurring narrative of *Miami Vice*, is re-read by Grossberg and Gitlin as a lack of narrative structure In short, what they see as a lack, a series of unrelated non-narrative images, a *bricolage a la* MTV, is, in fact, a systematic questioning of the patriarchal structures inherent in male-focused narratives, particularly cop-shows. If this is a break in meaning, a loss of a centre, then the truths that these critics hold on to, the truths that *Miami Vice* threatens, depend on fixed definitions of masculinity, and may be worth losing and breaking.

## Women

Though the narrative deconstruction of work in *Miami Vice* is not part of either Grossberg's or Gitlin's description of the programme, the notion that work is the flip side of consumerism within late capitalism does emerge as an essential structure of their definitions of postmodernism. Yet gender still remains obscured as an explicit issue within the postmodern debate, a structuring absence that can only be implicitly read into the masculine and feminine assignments given to categories of postmodernism like surface, consumption and work It is thus understandable that Gitlin and Grossberg overlook another consistent element of the *Miami Vice* narrative, the way in which Sonny is punished in his encounters with women Take the episode called 'For Duty and Honor', in which Elizabeth Ashley plays a D E A agent whose son is dying of a kidney dysfunction and whose husband is a paraplegic To keep her son alive, she gets money by selling information to a drug dealer. Sonny, a long-time friend of Ashley's character, is trying to arrest the dealer. The

dealer learns of Sonny's intentions from the agent and plots to kill him. Ashley is faced with a choice between money for her child's life and the prevention of Sonny's murder. She chooses to save Sonny and expose herself. Sonny arrests her This episode sets up a clear conflict between the woman's role as Mother and as Worker, a tension that is set up in many a patriarchal narrative to justify the inherent impossibility of women working In this case, however, the conflict is not resolved, we never learn the ultimate fate of the child. This episode poses the conflict for women as unsolvable, unsealed by narrative closure, and furthermore focuses on the unspoken pain that Sonny feels in doing his job, exemplified by his intoning 'you have the right to remain silent' while destroying a friend. The specific pain for Sonny here is separation from a woman, a motif that reappears his romantic relationships

Sonny's first fiancée was played by Helena Bonham Carter in an episode where she played a doctor addicted to heroin To get a fix, she uses information she sees in Sonny's file as leverage A police supply house is raided and Sonny is blamed, he deduces that his fiancée has sold the information and he confronts her She explains that she uses heroin only to control the chronic pain in her back, and that she can't give up being a doctor because her family needs the money Again, the icon of the monstrous woman who betrays is presented and then subverted, Carter's character is shown to be caught in a set of circumstances that are not within her control. There is an element of transgression in the fact that both these women are working in male dominated fields, a transgression that is punished Yet the women characters and their conflicts are shown to be part of a system, they are not individually blamed Just as responsibility (and subjectivity) is taken away by a narrative which places them in an uncontrollable situation, so, too, is the blame that is typically assigned to female characters After catching the dealers, Sonny and Carter's character decide that it would be better if she got away from Sonny's job, even though they still love each other The show ends with Sonny on a stakeout, mournfully looking at the ring he was going to give her In a similar series of episodes. Sonny meets, and then marries, a rock star character played by Sheena Easton In the final episode of their relationship, the man whom Sonny released in 'Forgive Us Our Debt' returns, and when Sonny tries to capture him, the con's lover is accidentally killed. In revenge, the evildoer kills the Easton character, who dies in Sonny's arms Again, Sonny is separated from the woman, again, it is made specific that work is responsible for this loss

This theme of separation from woman characters carries over into the episodes that centre around Enrico Tubbs, Sonny's partner In one, Tubbs, played by Philip Michael Thomas, must arrest his lover who shot her sister's murderer, in another, he befriends a teen prostitute, who is, unbeknownst to him, responsible for a series of

murders. Touched by the fact that Tubbs doesn't want her for sex, she drugs him, handcuffs him to the bed and shoots herself. This final example is extremely problematic for any kind of feminist reading, but there is a recurring motif of the painful loss of a woman, accompanied by the male's inability to control the loss

The recurring narrative structure, then, is the introduction of woman and then sadness at the inability to stop her destruction/removal. This is different than most cop shows, where Good women stay alive, but don't appear in the next episode, and Bad women are arrested or, if they are Really Bad, killed *Vice*, going against the grain of its genre, makes specific its psychic torture of the male characters  Kaja Silverman has theorized narrative as a retelling of the story of the initial loss of the imaginary whole created by the unity of the child and mother  This story is inherently masochistic and in patriarchal narratives it is usually told through the punishment and loss that the female characters experience  This is a part of a process that allows men to sympathize and identify with female characters  Tania Modleski suggests that Silverman's theory ignores the fact that the position of the male viewer is also sadistic, and that 'the male finds it necessary to repress certain "feminine" aspects of himself, and to project these exclusively onto the women who does the suffering for the both of them.'[20] The punishment of women is very much an element of *Vice* episodes; it is the catalyst that allows the story of Sonny's loss. There is a difference in the recurring nature of a television series and the Hitchcock texts that Modleski is analyzing, but the insistence with which this tale of male loss is told over and over again makes it possible to analyze Sonny as a character whose central trait is the pain he experiences when he is punished along with the women characters, by their deaths, abandonments and separations  The story of male loss being told in *Miami Vice* is told not only metaphorically, sadistically, through women, as in a Hitchcock film, but literally, specifically, through a male character. While *Miami Vice* still uses the device of women as a threat that must be excised, it is the male who is consistently wounded. This is a significant shift in gender identification, with the male character taking on a role usually given to women  the ragged survivor of the narrative

Yet this shift does not mean necessarily that the viewer will entirely identify with a character so entirely masochistic. As Modleski points out, the relationship of the male viewer to the on screen female victim is one involving a combination of masochistic and sadistic impulses [21] Sonny is the object of this sadism, he is spectacularly destroyed each week for our viewing pleasure. Furthermore, as the non-master of narrative, he is unable to reinforce the ego-ideal identification that characterizes the relationship of the male viewer to the conventional TV character Sonny may be, as Todd Gitlin suggests, the Lone Driver, but he is

20 Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York Routledge, 1988) pp 12–13

21 Ibid , p 14 And compare Mulvey 'The first avenue of escape (from castration anxiety), voyeurism has associations with sadism pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration) asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness' Mulvey op cit p 205

an isolated, objectified and finally tortured masculine individual – a heroic male subject – a myth – in crisis.

*Miami Vice*'s distinctive TV identity revolves around its redefinitions of gender roles, but these reworkings are by no means 'feminist'. Sonny may be feminized by his position, but his character is by no means feminine, a positive affirmation of traits associated with women. Like his stubble, his almost hyper-masculine characteristics (silence, emotionlessness, violence, etc.) reassure us that this suffering, punished human being is male and that the tenets of masculinity are not in too much danger. Sonny's macho stance and his affirmation of the masculine gender role, however, do not undermine the gender contradiction that the blatantly displayed Sonny Crockett embodies. It is to this contradiction that critics like Gitlin and Grossberg are responding. Throughout their analyses of culture, television, and *Miami Vice*, their definitions of postmodernism emerge as a description of confusions: a lack of

boundaries between low and high culture, information and work, buying and selling, 'reality' and image Yet, as this paper has attempted to point out. these categories have specific gender connotations, and the blurring between male and female is not another element to add to this list but instead its underlying theme In their survey of gender sociology and psychology, Carol Tavris and Carole Wade point to the overwhelming recurrence of a taboo against feminine behaviour in male children: 'The pressures on boys and girls to act in certain ways are uneven and unequal . Until adolescence, it is more permissible for girls to behave like tomboys than for boys to behave like sissies '[22] One of the explanations for this phenomenon is the lack of tolerance of characteristics associated with a lower-status group; in the playground, this group consists of girls. In this pre-adolescent world, nothing is so threatening as a sissy, the boy who takes on female characteristics, while the tomboy, since she validates 'positive' male attributes, is praised, for a time, at least. Sonny Crockett is, in his combinations of power and masochism, beauty and violence, consumption and work, a 'sissy', an exessively masculine character who has taken on characteristics culturally coded as feminine Like other postmodern critics Grossberg and Gitlin fear that all culture, and with it all humanity, is becoming pure surface, consumption without depth And the explosion of commodities, the aspect of *Miami Vice* that is its extravagance, its decadence, is then read as a truly terrifying possibility for American living. Their fear, however, is based not so much on the anxiety that *people* will be objectified and commodified, as on the anxiety that, for perhaps the first time, *men* will be The concept of mass and hip culture, objectification and depth, difference and identity are all so tied up in traditional and changing gender definitions that the lines blur between fear of Surface and the fear of becoming Woman

22 Carol Tavris and Carole Wade *The Longest War* (New York Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1984) p 222

## Endnote

In December of 1989, after I had completed the above essay, *TV Guide* published an article profiling 'The Twenty Top Television Personalities'. Don Johnson was included It was virtually a summation of all the pop criticism that I had seen about the show and Johnson's character.

As undercover cop Sonny Crockett on NBC's *Miami Vice*, Don Johnson redefined cool in the 80's, dressed in those white Armani jackets and pastel T-shirts, living on a 42-foot sloop, tooling around Miami in his Ferrari Testarossa, as if advertising his testosterone level. That gravelly voice, those blue eyes peering over designer shades, that trademark stubble, that shoulder

holster  The angst, the guilt: *Vice*'s favorite motif was to kill off almost everyone Crockett loved or was assigned to protect  In the last couple of seasons, though, Johnson's performance grew annoyingly self-indulgent. And his future as a movie star appears doubtful· 1989's 'Dead Bang' dropped dead at the box office. The role of his career may have already come – and gone – with the ending of his series  But Miami ought to dedicate a statue to him, complete with shades, T-shirt and stubble.[23]

23  The editors (author[s] unknown), *TV Guide* Vol 37 No 49 Dec 9 1989 (Radnor PA  News America Publications), p 16

In comparison to the other profiles on the stars of the 80's, this one takes on a particularly critical tone  There is a mocking resentment and fascination in precisely detailing the consumer objects that characterized Crockett. There were nineteen other profiles on stars from Bill Cosby to Morton Downey, but this was the only one that predicted a dim future for its subject  It seems that post-modern theorists are not the only ones threatened by this iconographic character.

# Some spatial characteristics of the Hollywood cartoon

## RUSSELL GEORGE

An attempt to isolate the most important restrictions under which
the construction of space operates in the Hollywood animated short
film – what we shall call the 'animated cartoon' or 'cartoon' – is
essential to its study. The cartoon, as an accompaniment to and
commentary on, as well as a sub-genre of, the classical paradigm,
often says as much about cinematic syntax as the feature film. It also
yields a great deal to the film theorist. Auteur theory can find in it
many highly individual and directly expressed directorial styles; a
structuralist approach is met by crystalline narrative structures,
ritualised iconography, and a plethora of rhetorical figurations; and
post-structuralism may explore the self-consciously discursive and
enunciative registers and the parodic, 'deconstructive' allusions to
the cliches of film syntax that abound in the cartoon
   The classical cartoon is here taken to have existed from 1928 (the
advent of sound) to 1965 – by which time most theatrical cartoon
studios had closed, and the output of those that remained was
mostly indistinguishable from the 'limited animation' television
product. The cartoon studios active in this period were Warner
Bros, MGM, Disney, Fleischer, Lantz, Famous, UPA, Columbia/
Screen Gems, Terrytoons, Iwerks, and Van Beuren This paper
refers to the work of the first 7, Warner Bros in particular, and, of
the Warners films, Chuck Jones' work within the studio are called
on most of all. My concern is more with the bounds of possibility of
the classical cartoon than with the generality of its normal practice,
therefore this bias is not motivated simply by availability, the
following is not an empirical but a theoretical discussion. It

concentrates firstly on how both the static and the moving cartoon shot differs from live-action, and attempts to categorize specific spatial operations in the cartoon, not only in the normal construction of the shot but also in the use of devices which try to provide a more 'realistic' rendering of deep space The action is situated within this spatial setting, and the animated figure is shown to embody textually the differences between cartoon and live-action that have been explored. It is suggested in conclusion that the greater cinematic intelligibility and freedom from intra-shot restrictions that are afforded by the cut and, by association, the narration in general, are nevertheless marked by these differences

## 1. The Shot

### 1.1. Camera and Surface

Central to isolating the cartoon's operational field is the demand made upon the camera as the instrument of the inscription of the image The camera is positioned facing and parallel to a flat surface with a drawing or painting upon it, so that this surface occupies the total field of the lens The camera's position, being a constant within certain parameters, becomes invisible, a prerequisite. There is therefore a transference or displacement of the task of providing a comprehensible story space In this sense the cartoon might be said to be independent of the photographic process – a flick-book of drawn animation requires no camera, whilst a similar book of live-action must of course be produced via a photographic process However in cinematic terms the status of this process as prior to and constitutive of cinema is in no way diminished, rather, it is accompanied by a second, generic necessity – specifically, the status of the object it records, the 'surface'

This does not preclude the existence of normal live-action in cartoons, that is, a photographic representation in which more than one reference object is reproduced as a flat surface, the photographic process itself providing the illusion of depth. Cut-aways to live-action as in *Rabbit Hood* (Jones, 1949) or extensive use of photographic stills and stock footage (*What's Cooking, Doc?* [Clampett, 1944]) are not beyond the brief of the cartoon, although they do present themselves to the spectator as unusual, in much the same way as the converse – the existence of some animation in otherwise normal live-action features like *Annie Hall* (Allen, 1977), *Mary Poppins* (Stevenson, 1964) and *Anchors Aweigh* (Sidney, 1945) – seem unusual but not problematic *Pink Floyd – The Wall* (Parker, 1982) switches effortlessly between the two, and *The Lord of the Rings* (Bakshi, 1978) extensively uses live-action footage with 'rotoscoped' (copied from live-action) cels (sheets of celluloid) laid over it in such a way that it is difficult even to isolate the two

processes The cartoon as a 6 or 7 minute – usually comic – short film is more than its scopic field alone; but too extended a deviation from the basic camera set-up described above undermines its status as a member of the category 'cartoon'. This is more obvious when we consider that live-action interframes (*TV of Tomorrow* [Avery, 1953]) or figures (the Disney *Alice* series) are easily accommodated by the cartoon, being captured within the surface-based mise-en-scene; whilst films featuring animated figures in a live-action setting are understood differently – nobody would call *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Zemeckis, 1988) an animation feature, but a feature with animation in it

Patently these mixtures of animation and live-action are possible because both processes are intelligible cinematically. Broadly, this combination may either be achieved within the shot (in which case at any one time the frame is divided into areas governed by each), or else through the mechanism of the cut However, one would be hard pressed to find instances of actual disruption of the cartoon genre by having the camera track across and *past* the animation surface to take in other referent objects – chair, floor, etc. There are cartoons (particularly from the early years of animation's history) which play with the nature of the cartoon illusion in ways akin to, but not the same as, this. For example, in the Fleischer *Out of the Inkwell* series the live-action acts as a temporal frame to the animation. The switch from one to the other is usually achieved by use of cutting, and, where it is not, the 'live-action' space which enters the field of the lens becomes space for the 'actor' (Koko the Clown) to use In truth, this 'live-action' is a photograph being used in the same way as a drawn or painted background. A more interesting example occurs in *Duck Amuck* (Jones, 1953)[1] where we track back from the cartoon scene to reveal a drawing board, chair and room with an animator seated and at work. This is not a continuous track, but is effected by a cut that is relatively 'invisible' (similar to the cut in towards the window at the start of *Psycho* [Hitchcock, 1960]) Further, this live-action drawing board and room is actually a photograph which thus, again, acts like a cartoon background; and the animator we see is himself an animation – Bugs Bunny The whole progression, whilst communicating the narrative intention that we have pulled back to reveal who has been making the cartoon, does not, however, relinquish its status as cartoon.

If the operation of the cartoon camera moving away from the surface is only ever simulated, its position squarely in front of and parallel to that surface *never* changes; neither in the 'deconstructive' processes of *Duck Amuck*, nor in the wildest 'alienation' gags of Avery (a director who in other respects 'never lets his audience forget they are watching a cartoon'[2]). Such a development would altogether disrupt the perspective represented on the surface by rendering this surface, in turn, in a recessional photographic

1 Louis Black has written of this cartoon that it 'stands as an almost clinical study of deconstruction of a text in the way it presents a whole at the beginning and then dismembers every facet of the cartoon, only to put them together at the end' Black quoted in Leonard Maltin *Of Mice and Magic A History of American Animated Cartoons* (New York and Scarborough Ontario New American Library 1987) p 263 It is because of these qualities that reference is made to *Duck Amuck* so often in the ensuing pages

2 Ronnie Schieb Tex Arcana The Cartoons of Tex Avery' in Peary Peary (eds) *The American Animated Cartoon* (New York EP Dutton 1980) p 113

perspective. At best this would constitute a film of a cartoon, and not a cartoon film.

## 1.2. Perspective and Composition

Cartoons, like all cinema, are spatially organized first and foremost by the camera, an instrument which through 'the exquisite minuteness of the delineation'[3] offers us 'perspective as reality, reality as perspective' [4] In terms of the camera, there is a sense (formally if not substantively) in which the cartoon consists of only one 'camera angle' Being a generic constant, one can see how this uniformity may become a relatively 'invisible' convention However, if the camera organizes a representation of the surface but merely reproduces the specificity of that surface, then in what way does this difference become intelligible? We might initially suppose that the cartoon, involving as it does a second prerequisite (the surface) beyond that of the camera, is phenomenologically more complex than live-action film, we read a painterly image of depth through the photographic medium, in a double movement Yet this is nonsensical, any photograph or reproduction of a painting offers no more problem in interpretation than does the painting itself. Pirenne writes that 'In binocular position the disparities between the array of angles corresponding to the eyes are different for the projection on a surface and for the actual objects As stereoscopic vision indicates depth, or lack of depth, mainly on the basis of such disparities, it will as a rule show that the picture is only a surface' [5] This is as true for a photograph/reproduction of a picture as it is for a photograph as such One might therefore argue that the cartoon is, on the contrary, *more* readily comprehensible than normal cinema, it is conceived as a flat surface and reproduced as a flat surface; the imputation of an illusion of 'realistic' depth is eliminated. However, the same processes are at work in comprehending the perspective in the drawing as in any normal photograph The flatness of any projected image (live-action or cartoon) is acknowledged by the visual perception of the spectator, but for the purposes of the depth illusion this awareness is, in Neale's word, 'managed'.[6]

Nevertheless there is a difference between them Start a camera rolling and it will organize a picture – a camera always produces a picture of something (if only an out-of-focus close-up lens cap or the proverbial black cat in a dark alley at midnight) Whilst live-action is premised on the presence of the lens (transparency; absence), the cartoon is in addition premised on the nature and status of this 'something' – the presence of the surface. This surface presence – even in its general 'invisibility' – is therefore present in the organization of space in cartoons In live-action, perspective (and here we are abstracting it from aesthetic/compositional norms) is an operation of the intelligibility one brings to the film in order to 'manage' it, it is the premise on which the film functions, but in the

3 Morse quoted in Steve Neale *Cinema and Technology Image Sound Colour* (London Macmillan/BFI, 1985) p 21

4 Neale *ibid* p 21

5 Pirenne, quoted in Neale *ibid* p 18

6 Neale *ibid* p 19

cartoon, it is also present *to* the text, it can be played with. 'True' binocular depth is somewhere else in cinema, and a substitutive illusion is organized by the camera. But cartoons organize themselves around the illusory matrix alone, they are premised on both the absence of illusory depth – the 'original' drawing, and also its presence – the two-dimensionality of both the 'original' drawing and the cinema screen. The action is never premised on its actual, virtual, or 'real' incidence (as, for example, pro-filmic events in a real set), but on its relation to the cinematic absence of depth (and presence of the cinema screen) As we shall see, this co-existence of the absence and presence of its illusory space necessarily manifests itself as play.

I am not here making any specific claims distinguishing between the contents of live-action and cartoon films on this basis, be they the structure of jokes or of narratives A great many live-action films textually explore the nature of the cinematic illusion in terms of an explicit play with absence and presence, the generality of the topic is such that it can apply to anything from *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958) to *Airplane* (Abrahams, Zucker, Zucker, 1980). What I am claiming as being specific to the cartoon is the type of formal spatial mechanisms in operation across these relatively isolatable substantive elements (jokes, story etc ) Take, for example, the opening moments of *Duck Amuck* Here, Daffy Duck leaps into a spatially perfectly intelligible setting, in the foreground is a stone floor and steps, farther back are some trees and grass and a stone bridge, then a tall hill with a castle atop it, and then, farther back still, more trees, a mountain, and a clear blue sky; all of which generically correspond with the dashing Errol Flynn costume he is sporting. However, as he moves across left and the camera tracks with him, this background simply peters out, until there is only a blank screen Given the cartoon constant of a surface, this blankness is a representation of nothing Within the picture there are no comprehensible spatial coordinates. When Daffy stands facing the camera, one cannot situate him as in front of, or on, or in, this nothing However, this 'ambiguity' of Daffy's spatial setting is not, in effect, problematic because the prerequisite of a flat surface has been accepted by the spectator Nor is the 'nothing' unintelligible; take away the pictorial spatial coordinates and one is still left with something – the surface that is accepted, and this because, being 'managed', the surfaceness of the picture is always present to some degree A camera processes light in a uniform way and produces a perspectival image, therefore, if live-action film wants to construct a spatial composition which emphasizes certain graphic or pictorial elements not only over and above but as distinct from an illusion of depth, then that composition must be constructed against the constant perspectival interpretative function of the camera Furthermore, it can only be successful in relative terms, a

comparable live-action figure would still be understood as in front of a white set, or leaning against a white wall (even if careful lighting has eliminated shadow, and type of lens has minimized relief), or matted onto a white background (where s/he remains photographically rendered in perspective and thus visibly distinct from her/his filmic environment). Because a flatness is already there in the cartoon, it does not have to relatively deemphasize perspective; rather, it has to create it.

All this is an inevitable consequence of the nature of the two media of photography and painting. Photography is a process for high-definition processing of light according to criteria set down by Quattrocento Renaissance perspective which offers only one solution to the intelligible construction of a picture. Indeed, the Quattrocento system is itself based on the 'lens' (or glass) – Alberti· 'I describe a rectangle of whatever size I please, which I imagine to be an open window through which to view whatever is depicted there'.[7] Cartoons are based not only on the glass and the ideal of a representation of 'reality', but also on the surface and thus the extent to which the picture (as in Alberti's 'imagining') remains a construct essentially different from this reality. Which is why, even in the most detailed super-realism of Disney, the cartoon is understood as unreal in relation to live-action, despite being no more difficult to decode

Rarely does the representation of 'nothing' – or, rather, a blank canvas, described in *Duck Amuck*, occur. Freedom from photographic perspectival criteria is usually played with in cartoons in a more complex way, particularly in the possibilities for the general construction of the space in which the camera operates; that is, in terms of layout This will become clearer as we move from a consideration of the construction of the image *per se* to the movement of the camera and the design of the space within which it moves However, some account should first be taken of the relation of these questions of perspective to the actual practice and compositional conventions of both cartoon and film David Bordwell has pointed out that in normal, live-action cinema·

> The importance of planes and volumes in defining classical scenographic depth makes academic perspective rather rare . . images in the Hollywood cinema seldom exhibit the central vanishing point, raked and chequered floorplans, and regular recession of planes characteristic of    the 'Quattrocento cube' (Such conventions are far more common in pre-classical films  . ) The classical shot is more usually built out of a few planes placed against a distant background plane .  . in medium-long and medium shots (the majority of shots in a film), linear perspective remains of little importance    .[8]

Bordwell is in general at pains to point out that use of lens as well

7   Alberti, quoted in Neale *ibid* p 18

8   David Bordwell 'The Classical Hollywood Style 1917-60 in Bordwell Staiger Thompson *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London Routledge 1985) p 15

9  David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London Routledge 1988) p 107

as the composition of the objects photographed can result in compositions quite markedly different from linear perspective [9] Here we would do well to appeal to the specular association of both the photograph and classical perspective with 'reality'; such non-linear perspectival compositions can be understood as a distortion of or deviation from, and therefore dependent upon, a norm which the photographic process classically exemplifies, and these deviations are often motivated (whether diegetically or not) by a desire to be expressive rather than 'realistic'. (It is in expressionist cinema that live-action often comes closest to cartoons – in another context, the space of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* [Wiene, 1919] might be described as a UPA-type background style ) Whilst the cartoon is certainly informed by photographic norms, it need not be constituted around them

As for the general Hollywood practice of plane composition, this certainly has its correlate in cartoons. The use of a wall parallel to the camera is very common – *Swing Ding Amigo* (McKimson, 1966) and *Little Orphan Airedale* (Jones, 1947) are just two examples among hundreds. This has the added advantage that the contiguous representation of side walls in linear perspective (i.e so that the angle between 'side' and 'back' wall is greater than the 90° it represents) allows the visibility of up to three out of four walls where the action may then be staged, thus delimiting the need for movement into the scene. Yet this precisely constitutes the kind of 'pre-classical' staging which Bordwell mentions, the cartoon, more even than the slapstick comedy or the musical, retains full-figure, external staging, and thus flaunts its perspectival liberty just as live-action deemphasizes its perspectival restrictedness [10]

10  Five randomly selected cartoons – *A Tale of Two Kitties* (WB Clampett 1942 Blue Ribbon Version) *Napoleon Bunny Part* (WB Freleng 1956), *That's My Pup* (MGM Hanna, Barbera 1953), *Puss Cafe* (Disney [RKO] Nichols 1950) and *Trailblazer Magoo* (UPA [Columbia] Burness, 1956) were studied for the ratio of full-figure shots (or those that would be so were it not for props that partially obscure the figure, etc ) and other long shots of figures to shorter, medium-long to close-up shots Where more than one figure is foregrounded and one is full-figure whilst the other is not (this situation usually arising out of size disparity – cat and mouse, etc ) – the shot is counted as full-figure The ratios were  45 full-figure to 4 closer, 49 to 9  40 to 2  66 to 17  and 25 to 1 respectively – a total of 225 to 34, or 6 7 to 1

It should also be noted, to step ahead of my argument somewhat, that the use of full-figure staging in pre-classical cinema was linked to a reluctance to use cutting,[11] and that this feature 'returns' in the cartoon – not, one should add, as a continuation of this reluctance, but as what Metz calls a 'dead' figuration, 'arrested, but still carrying meaning' [12] The use of cutting integrates the cartoon into normal cinematic spatial operations, but correlatively demonstrates that it is only thus that cartoons and live-action can be generally spatially commensurate, in other words, that the cartoon shot remains different from the generality of cutting in a way that the live-action shot (being the norm) is not – an argument I shall return to  Whilst the specific function of any particular cut is in no way affected in terms of an intelligible contiguity by being in the cartoon medium, the total cutting structure of a cartoon may well feature the 'return' of this unusual relation of shot to cut  An extreme example is *What's Opera, Doc?* (Jones, 1957), which uses some 104 cuts ('A frequency ratio that makes Alain Resnais look like Antonioni').[13] Accelerated cutting in features usually signifies an exciting or cathartic event, whilst here it creates the impression that a great

11  Kristin Thompson  The Formulation of the Classical Style 1908–28  in Bordwell Staiger Thompson *op cit*  p 161

12  Christian Metz *Psychoanalysis and Cinema  The Imaginary Signifier* (London  Macmillan 1982) p 157

13  Richard Thompson  Meep-Meep in Peary  Peary *op cit*  p 219

deal is going on, to the point that Jones can make the altogether untrue claim that the film condenses the *Ring of the Nibelung* into six minutes.[14]

The cut attains a particular structural significance in the cartoon because it offers a solution to spatial problems that, in live-action, could be resolved by other means. Elucidation of the extent of the camera's spatial liberty within the shot helps to clarify this

## 2. Camera in Movement

I have mentioned the circumscribed mobility of the cartoon camera; yet in effect the camera can move about in any relation to its object, just as in live-action, provided that it remains parallel to that object (the surface). We need to provide a much fuller account of what restrictions are at work In doing so, it is convenient to distinguish two main operative functions of the camera's mobility, namely, lateral movement across the screen, and forward/backward movement within the 'field' (of the distance of camera from surface);[15] whilst nevertheless recognizing that often the two are combined, resulting in somewhat more complex effects. Movement through the field is a useful operation for the demonstration of the perspectival repercussions of the surface-based predication of the cartoon; whilst a consideration of lateral movement helps explain how the cartoon copes with these repercussions

### 2.1. Movement through the Field

Consider a piece of film of a photograph, shot head-on, filling the screen, and in which neither camera nor photograph move Provided that the film has not informed us in its diegesis that this is a photograph, and provided that there is nothing in the photograph that might normally be expected to move ('extra-cinematic significations')[16] then the shot will of itself be indistinguishable from footage of live-action; the production fact of the presence of the photograph will not be present as such in the text Similar footage of a representational/perspectival painting is present in the text, but for what we might term graphic reasons – definition, style, etc – which are only linked to perspective by the association of photography with 'true' perspective However, if the camera tracks forward into the field, the static nature of the image becomes very obvious

Move a movie camera into a scene and, with each frame, it will re-frame the composition in such a way that referent objects in the field of vision will be in different positions relative to each other and, furthermore, will be shot from a different angle. Indeed, the total image will be altogether different, and it is the 'Φ phenomenon', narrative expectations, 'contiguity', etc. – the operation of a conventional code extraneous to the constitution of

14 Jones, in Joe Adamson Chuck Jones Interviewed in Peary, Peary *op cit* p 133 Conversely *Trailblazer Magoo Touche and Go* (WB Jones, 1957) and, quintessentially *Duck Amuck* move laterally into adjacent space to such an extent that cutting becomes unnecessary whilst many cheaper cartoons like *Robin Hoody Woody* (Lantz Smith 1963) use a lot of shot-reverse shot cutting (framed from outside the action) to *disguise* or break up the extensive use of a very few backgrounds

15 cf Maltin *op cit* p 467

16 Christian Metz Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film' in *Screen Reader 2 Cinema and Semiotics* (London The Society for Education in Film and Television 1981) p 89

space in any one frame – that maintains intelligibility. The camera can move through the set itself, in such a way that objects can be understood to be present to the diegesis as and after the camera has tracked past them  The same photographic process at work relative to our photograph or painting reveals that picture as surface, there are no referent objects, and the camera cannot move through the scene because the scene is depicted *on* a flat surface. There is a disparity between the camera's function as generative of new renderings of perspective and the unchanging perspectival orientation of the scene depicted.

Often the cartoon attempts syntactically to minimize this effect  For example, establishing shots of 'objects' at some distance involve very little compensatory movement of these objects if rendered in a live-action track forward, and so the visible disparity is slight – for example, the track in on the house in which the construction worker lives in *One Froggy Evening* (Jones, 1955). Or else movement through the field is used to move in on objects that are spatially very close together, again, so that very little compensation would be necessary – in *A Pest in the House* (Jones, 1947) we move in on a wall some distance away, the only relief objects being Daffy Duck and a radiator, both of which are staged immediately in front of the wall  There are many other examples of this camera progression where the on-screen image has not been designed to delimit its obviousness, however, the forward track tends to be used sparingly, the progression itself being quite small, with no more than half the original image disappearing off-screen in a movement into the field (unless of course it is flaunted, as it is at the conclusion of *Dixieland Droopy* [Avery, 1954], where a movement from an extreme aerial long shot in to the fleas on Droopy's back minimizes the number of dissolves to new pictures that are required by moving into an extreme detail of each). Alternatives include a cut in on the background – a progression much favoured by cartoons produced under stringent budgets – or, more generally, solutions that avoid the progression altogether  For example, the start of *Cheese Chasers* (Jones, 1951), in which a shot which aims to take in successive lumps of half-eaten cheese in a movement into the main action does so by tracking across the cheeses with the vanishing point set far outside the total background (at right), a compromise between a flat, lateral track and a track forward past/over the cheeses.

Perhaps more important at this stage than these syntactical tendencies are the metatheoretical implications. Firstly, perspective is read differently in cartoons than in live-action, and, more specifically, becomes a substantive feature of the shot; one of the various paradigmatic options for the construction of mise-en-scene in its particularity, rather than a preexistent system within which space is to be organized  Secondly, consider that normal focus, given a centred construction (e.g  around a figure), deemphasizes the edges

of the frame, whilst in cartoons focus is uniform In a similar way, the live-action camera moving into and through a set is biased towards the centre of the frame by virtue of the curvature of the lens, a track through a narrow alley centred around the end of the alley will have the least definition and most blurred speed at the frame's edges as the walls go by If we ignore for the moment devices like 'multiplaning' (to which I shall return), this phenomenon is of necessity absent from the cartoon, thus, in the cartoon there is a greater uniformity of centre and edges of the frame when compared to live-action. In comparative terms, the frame is *decentred* in the cartoon, and it is this that affords the 'graphic play' we have mentioned In other words, if the cartoon plays with its flatness, then to this extent this flatness no longer needs to be 'managed' by the spectator. In relative terms, the onus of this managing operation is therefore less upon the disparity between binocular and monocular images (normal film) and more upon the disparity between the (projected) 'presence' and the actual absence of the image – the index of which is the frame. It is what lies beyond the boundaries of this frame that constitutes the cartoon's reaction to and play with this disparity, and it is to this that I now turn.

## 2.2. Lateral Movement

It is difficult to distinguish solid categories from the responses the cartoon offers because the medium itself is so versatile For example, where the background consists entirely of a wall layout as discussed above (and without the side walls that perspectivally orient it), perspective in such circumstances must be described as indeterminate

Perhaps one of the most curious features of the cartoon lateral track is the prevalence of the left to right progression, which easily outnumbers its counterpart. It would appear that Western graphematic traditions of reading from left to right have strongly influenced both the production and, if only through its predominance, the codic significance of the cartoon track A left to right action is 'read' with ease, often being associated with the hero/winner, the chase, entering into new territory, etc , whilst a right to left action more commonly involves the villain/loser, interventionism, an increase in complexity, etc.[17] The following constitutes a preliminary (and very much provisional) attempt at distinguishing between the different possibilities which the cartoon background explores.

*a)* *quattrocento*
Here the total layout visibly adheres to classical perspectival demands An example is the penultimate shot of *The Invisible Mouse* (Hanna/Barbera, 1947), where Spike the bulldog is chasing

17 For example, *Porky in Wackyland* (Clampett 1939) has Porky travelling to the distant, crazy world of Wackyland which is first seen in a long rightward track across its many 'oddball' features Analogously but also by contrast Daffy moves leftwards into the increasingly threatening world of the animator in *Duck Amuck* Wackyland is 'somewhere else', and Porky is an innocent spectator in it the world of *Duck Amuck* is immanent and utterly threatening to Daffy s self-image

Tom (the cat) around the block, hitting him with a golf club  A long wall recedes into the distance, where it squares off and runs parallel to the camera, the vanishing point exists on the horizon at around the centre of the total background. Yet to call this a realistic picture in perspectival terms would be problematic; the deep-recessional perspective seems *too* forced, and Tom, whose head keeps popping up from behind the wall as Spike hits him, seems not to recede in size to the same extent as the wall does – presumably so that he 'reads' better on screen. A painted background can be more or less similar to a photograph in perspectival terms, and yet the two media remain different. This is very obvious with the moving photograph, the fact that the frame at different moments sees different parts of a background that in each part and *in toto* corresponds to the same perspective, means that the boundaries of the frame are textually integral to the intelligibility of the composition as a whole (unlike in live-action, where it is the relative positions and movements of referent objects)  Conversely, too strong and deep a perspective within the frame would make tracking across it in a spatially consistent way difficult unless the camera was moving to an altogether different (if adjacent) space

A large number of pre-UPA cartoon backgrounds broadly correspond to classical, Quattrocento perspective  It was the UPA studio which introduced layouts and designs which ignored the demands of Disney-style 'realism' and flaunted the graphic, non-perspectival possibilities of the medium  These practices were hugely influential and were widespread by the mid-1950's.

*b)  Synthetic Perspective. The Simulated Pan*
Another spatial restriction which acts to decentre the image – or, rather, the camera – is its inability to pan, as this would necessitate a loss of parallelism to the surface  In order to achieve a pan effect the cartoon must design its story space as an arc, akin to Da Vinci's 'synthetic perspective' [18] A background is devised in which relative positions of objects is distorted with regard to what such objects would normally 'really' look like (in linear perspective), and it is the disparity between the two that makes the process intelligible as an effect. The further away the story object(s), the less noticeable this is, whilst the fact that the surface contains no referent objects in motion bears witness to the fact that the camera is in fact moving laterally

This effect is very common in its less obtrusive form, far less common is the audaciousness of the example shown in **Figure 1**, which is derived from *Mouse Warming* (Jones, 1952)  The start and finish points are shown by the frames, and the camera rests in both places, whilst the intermediate area is covered in approximately a second  It will be noted that the camera does not move strictly laterally, but follows the background in a slight arc  The
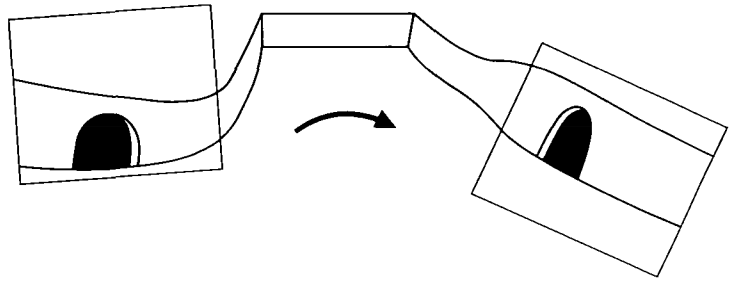
noticeability of the camera's non-panning motion is thus disguised,
in that it is not a clearly distinguishable lateral movement;
nonetheless, the pronounced curvature of the walls depicted remains
very obvious

### c) Double Perspective through Time

This procedure consists of an elaborate and extreme change in
perspective, rather than a gradual pan effect  The camera tracks
across what are effectively two pictures, each with their own
perspectival orientation. An example of this is a shot in *Mouse
Wreckers* (Jones, 1949), where the camera moves down the length of
a ladder on a house. **Figure 2** also simulates this process  At first the
ladder is angled towards the camera, such that the length of it gets
larger/comes nearer, whilst it also has a tendency to move to the
right of the frame  Then the picture changes direction, the ladder
gets smaller/recedes, and angles to the left of the frame  The overall
effect is analogous to an incredibly fast crane shot, sweeping into
and then away from the building, and with the camera shifting from
a leftward to a rightward tilt with regard to the horizontal; whilst in
truth the camera has simply tracked straight down the length of the
background, and it is the picture itself which has 'changed
direction'  Here, in contrast to the 'curved' pan, the perspective
distortion is very acute – the ladder and house (virtually) bend –
and, compensatorily brief, it takes less time to move past the small
section of the background where the distortion occurs than it does to
move across the longer if less acute distortion in our *Mouse
Warming* example  Indeed, any distinction between the effects in
*Mouse Warming* and *Mouse Wreckers* is necessarily one of degree,
the difference consists in the ratio between extent of visible
distortion and amount of space used to achieve this distortion.
Further, whilst this effect is used four times in *Mouse Wreckers*, it is
rare in this form, and appears to be peculiar to Jones films of the
period

   The curved background functions to effect a pan, the function of
the use of double perspective is rather less obvious  It would appear
to be designed precisely to achieve a camera movement that is in
general beyond the capabilities of normal cinema  Background

Camera
stationary
here

tracks
down

and
stationary
again
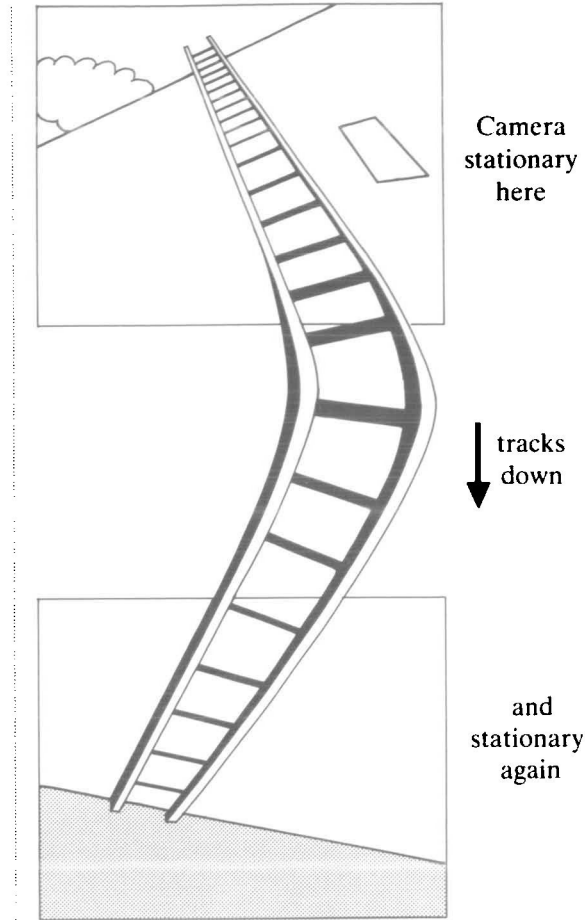
**Figure 2**

distortion is often used in much simpler ways to similar ends; a background designed to be passed at speed might have slanted-over trees, walls, etc., which signify speed in the cartoon just as a blurred and indistinct background would do likewise in normal film.

*d)   Double Perspective with Intermediate Space*
Here, what are effectively two differently constructed images are bridged by a track through an intermediate area which separates them, thus avoiding the 'bends' and 'curves' described above. This intervening section is representationally or perspectively indeterminate – the wall device is common – unlike the pictures at the background's extremes. For example, in *Wabbit Twouble* (Clampett, 1941) there is a gag where a bear chases Elmer Fudd (a large, fat version of the character) through some trees (each figure dashing behind one tree only to emerge from behind another), past a treeless area, and into some more. This is rendered by means of a rightward track, and each cluster of trees is represented *en bloc* with

its own vanishing point located somewhere within/behind it, such that, as the two figures enter each group we see the front and left sides of the trees, and on their emerging, the front and right. Thus each group of trees has an independent vanishing point, and the open space between them acts as a neutral area which separates the 'two pictures' and thus renders the perspectival difference less obtrusive. Often backgrounds will be designed so that the more perspectively determinate picture(s) at the extreme(s) will be used for static staging, whilst the indeterminate/intermediate space is used for action at speed.

Figure 3
Double perspective with intermediate space, derived from *The Dover Boys* (Jones, 1942) – an interior becomes an exterior shot by tracking across intermediate graphic space
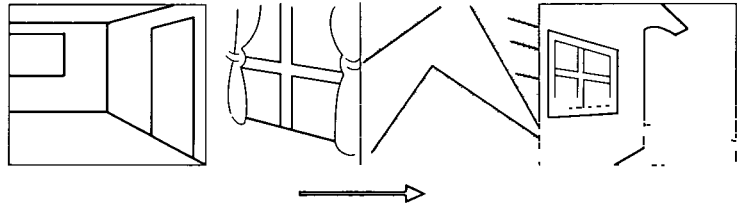
Graphically expressionistic distortion can also act as intermediate space In *Dripalong Daffy* (Jones, 1951) the camera 'sweeps' from Daffy at the bar to the villain 'Nasty Canasta'. The intermediate space features cowboys seated at tables, treated very schematically, rendered in simple blocks of colour, with no inking of outlines, details or features. This track 'feels' like a zip-pan (to the spectator), because 'zip-tracks' are not available to, and thus not a part of, normal cinematic language; and because the zip-pan is being satirized as precisely the kind of operation to be expected in a Western at the point where the villain enters the bar. The sheer speed of the track operates to diminish awareness that this is a track, whilst the intermediate space imitates the zip-pan without emulating it This type of progression depends on certain acts of interpretation carried out via a familiarity with the generality of cinematic syntax, the gap between the normal cinematic and the cartoon operations – the blur of the zip-pan and the wash-graphics of this shot – is the gap in which the spectator nonetheless knows that this is simply a cartoon lateral track; the gap in which the cartoon 'play' operates. This means that the cartoon is capable of effecting a complete change of image – scene represented, composition, perspective – without the intermediate successive recomposing of the image during the camera's movement by the photographic process in each individual frame. Instead, the cartoon can use an indeterminate intermediate space, or simply track directly to a second image, as in the *Mouse Wreckers* example. In live-action, only the cut to an adjacent area can achieve this; it follows that the cartoon lateral track can be a substitute for a cut in this respect

### e) Decentred Layout

19 Jones in Greg Ford Richard
Thompson 'Chuck Jones
Interview in *That's Not All
Folks!* A Primer in Cartoonal
*Knowledge* (London BFI 1984)
p 14

The wall-as-background device (that is, wall as parallel to surface and camera) offers a substantive excuse (in terms of the object represented) for failing to render a determinable perspective; yet many other backgrounds do not take recourse to such convenient diegetic staging Consider the 'flattened out, more Japanese'[19] layouts in Maurice Noble's designs for the *Road Runner* series, detailed contouring, indication of light source and other depth cues are eliminated, and recessional lines altogether abandoned

There can be little doubt that this type of background is far more common to the post-UPA 'style' rather than to the cartoons of the 1930's and 40's and the ascendancy of Disney Disney's 'realism' operates under the aegis of an ideological commitment to a high-definition graphic style and linear monocular perspective, relying on a conventional association of high-definition with photography Specific features like use of shadow (and correlative light source) exemplify this This use of 'definition' is of course only relatively successful – normal live-action is not going to be confused with a late 1930's *Silly Symphony*. There is no question of a duplication, but rather a simulation The UPA style explicitly rejects these criteria, and insists that definition (and therefore representation) should operate along the lines of an exploration of graphic styles; the diegetic space need only be recognizable as a picture of a house, a car, etc. Graphic style becomes overtly (i.e. textually) distinguishable from the scene represented A perspectively centred composition offers a static view of an ordered space; a decentred composition offers a less 'static' and therefore a potentially more 'mobile' view Examples in UPA cartoons (e.g *Trailblazer Magoo*) and the *Road Runner* series tend to be shots where the camera tracks across an extended background In this sense, by failing to emphasize a fixed vanishing point these compositions emphasize the edges of the frame and what potentially lies beyond them

The assumption that graphic style and objects depicted can be relatively independent is strikingly verified by a device used in many television cartoons since the early 1960's – the scroll background (which can be found, for example, in virtually any episode of *The Flintstones* [Hanna/Barbera]) Here, a decentred, indeterminate perspective carries the burden of the action (usually a chase at speed) to such an extent that it is not felt necessary to let the objects depicted have any other function than their formal graphic



Figure 4
Decentred background space,
derived from *Trailblazer
Magoo!*
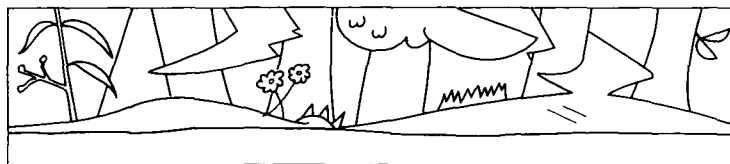
role of being objects being passed In this way the same sequence of objects – tree, house, shrub, etc (in other words, the same drawing) is passed over and over again in the same shot Here. in the interests of economics, the relationship between design and scene is not simply one of relative difference but of a veritable divorce, the image is not designed to communicate the existence of its constituent objects In short, it chooses to signify speed by destroying the signification of non-inconsistent space Hence the description of these cartoons as 'limited animation' is particularly apposite here; the cartoon limits its acts of signification, even if this means isolating the signifier from its proper place in the structure of spatial articulation.

This, then, is a basic elaboration of the operations of space in the cartoon as divorced, on the one hand, from that which it frames and stages, and which is not spatially static – the animation – and, on the other, from the wider spatial intelligibility which is afforded by the cut However, the cartoon does offer several devices for a 'truer' representation of depth of field, and these need to be situated within our overall framework

### 3. Qualifiers to the Cartoon Background

#### 3.1. The Multiplane

The Multiplane camera was hugely influential in providing an illusion of depth within the confines of the painted backgrounds of the 'normal' cartoon. Although according to Leonard Maltin 'Ub Iwerks had developed something similar in the mid-1930's',[20] the invention is generally credited to the Disney studio, where its possibilities were first shown in *The Old Mill* (Jackson, 1937).

> Built at a cost of $70,000 and standing fourteen feet high, this invention enabled the camera to look through a series of animation 'planes' instead of just one, so that the finished picture would have a feeling of depth and dimension [21]

I want to treat the Multiplane in a similar fashion to my consideration of camera movement generally; that is, by dividing its functions into lateral movement and movement through the field(s)

#### *3.1.i Lateral Multiplaning*

In the lateral multiplane, the camera tracks across a scene, and different sections of the background move across the screen at different speeds, depending on their position in the composition. Objects that are in the foreground move quickly, those in the background less so, and the sky, sun or moon at the very back remain stationary In this way depth of field – classical perspective – is simulated, just as different points on a series of lines stretching

20 Maltin *op cit* p 51

21 *ibid*

away to a vanishing point will move at different rates depending on how far away they are.

Nonetheless, perspective is only 'relationally' or formally simulated. The image is centred around an axis. Therefore the different objects shown should not simply move at different comparative rates, but should also reveal different parts of themselves to the camera depending on where they are – a horse on a merry-go-round does not simply move across, it moves around so that sometimes we see its head, and sometimes its tail. The images in a multiplane effect, however, have not been animated/redrawn but simply relationally moved. The degree of our 'positional bias' is related to how centred the image is perspectively – a closer/more acute vanishing point will result in a larger shift in our view of the objects passing by (i.e , the front of a house should move slightly faster than the back of it, etc.) It follows that the more the multiplane displays its function of relational perspective, the more each plane of itself will stand out as being 'only a drawing'. In effect the spectator is, as it were, getting several backgrounds for the price of one. Each constituent plane, of itself, thus operates in an entirely 'lateral' way in the same way as our camera moving across a photograph or normal cartoon background, indeed the awareness of this is only lessened in terms of conformity to recessional perspective, whilst in terms of visible on-screen action it is heightened; instead of one general 'laterality', all the planes are operating laterally but differently (at different rates to) all the others. I am not claiming either that the perspectival relational effect of recession or the comparative effect of lateral obviousness are dominant, or that they cancel each other out; rather, a particular overall effect is achieved

Further, the rates at which each plane should move can become problematized Live-action reinterprets the whole field of vision with
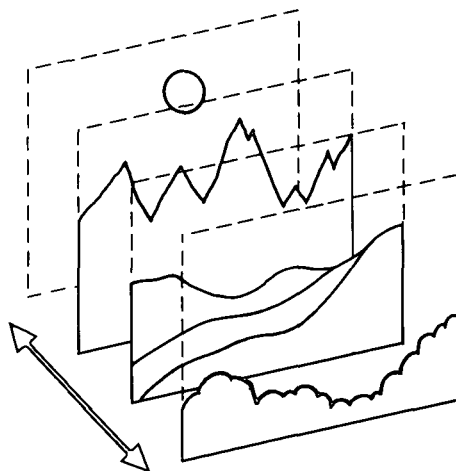
each frame. Multiplaning reinterprets a finite number of points in the total depth of field, and moves them as if they were 2-dimensional (which, as pictures, they are). All this occurs in a pictorial metier where, as we have shown, greater freedom operates in the options for the creation of perspective than occurs with photography. In this way it is all too easy to realize that the relative movements, whilst centring the picture perspectivally, may come to seem forced or unreal in that the choice of which 'point' (and therefore which rate of movement) in the field the particular object represented should be reduced to is, to an extent, arbitrary

All this leads to the conclusion that lateral multiplaning offers greater production value and spectacle in terms of an illusion of depth of field, but to call this imitative of live action is problematic without specifying the codes of its operation, in no sense are the cartoon's operations detailed above replaced by photographic 'forms' of perspective; nor is the presence of the surface to the cartoon undermined

### 3.1.ii. Multiplaning through the Field(s)

It should be noted that lateral multiplaning relies for its effects entirely upon the variation between planes of relative speed, and thus does not require the Multiplane camera itself, the chief function of which is to vary the relative spatial distance of each plane from the next. It is this process that occurs in producing the effect of movement of the camera into the field itself.

Patently many of the observations I have made about lateral multiplaning also hold good here the questionable extent to which each picture gets larger/comes closer in relation to the next, and the fact that each plane is not of itself animated and thus gets larger at a uniform rate (as with the camera and photograph example). Despite these reservations, this process does succeed in fragmenting (or, at least, 'deferring') the unitary surface as prerequisite of the cartoon The end of *Willie the Operatic Whale* (Luske, Geronimi, 1946)[22] provides an example. The camera moves away from and down the image shown – a shot of (Whale) heaven As it does so, a border of clouds comes into view, moving into the field of vision at a slower rate than that at which the camera moves away from its subject Effectively – and it hardly matters that this was not true at the production stage – the camera has moved *through* this border of clouds, or picture of a border of clouds. It is this very insistence – an insistence that it remains a background – which dictates that, unlike the animated section of the image, which in general is afforded a mobility by definition different to that of the background, here the setting actually becomes dynamic It exists in 3 dimensions The camera can move through the space Couple this with the possibility that the 'final' background need not be stationary (as would be necessary if it were of the sky, sun, etc ) but can also be

22 Originally part of the feature *Make Mine Music* (Luske Kinney Armstrong, Geronimi Cormack 1946) as The Whale Who Wanted to Sing at the Met '

mobile, and 'the background' becomes relativized and fragmented. When the relative quantifiability of the field between camera and background becomes problematized, then so does the status of that field, if you don't know where the background is, you don't know where the camera is. The essential 'flatness' of the constituent spatial elements, and thus the general premises of the cartoon's operation, remain unaltered, but in that the place of this flatness is confused, the place of the diegetic space becomes more convincing (in much the same way that the total relativity of each object from frame to frame in normal cinema de-emphasizes the surface of the cinema screen)

In the normal cartoon, the field defines the relation of lens to surface. In field multiplaning, this first surface also acts as another lens (cel) in relation to the next surface, which is also a lens/cel, and so on, the circuit is completed by a surface pure and simple (as in all cartoons). Thus, through the use of what is in actuality a depth-photographic process (with relative objects), the surface is both fragmented and distended The irregular variation of the different planes force the spectator to abandon awareness of a specific, unitary surface, and thus to embrace other explanatory frameworks – the normal photographic and, more importantly, the diegetic spatial possibilities

### 3.1.iii   The Multiplane and Syntax

Field multiplaning has a very restricted place in the classical cartoon, being exclusive to one studio (Disney) and one era (late 30's, early 40's). Lateral multiplaning is much more widespread – different relative movement of planes (if only of one or two) could feasibly be achieved without the Multiplane Camera itself In many such examples the equation of the process with 'realism' is substantially weakened For example, *What's Opera, Doc?* uses the flat washes of colour of post-UPA styles, and a multiplane effect – the foregrounding of trees – is used for purely compositional ends (no attempt is made to contour or render in depth the relative objects themselves; much greater relative distances often occur in the film without use of multiplaning) In other cartoons, all photographic realism is jettisoned precisely to serve the ends of representation of depth of field, as when lateral multiplaning is used for a field multiplane effect. Here, as in *Scaredy Cat* (Jones, 1948) and many TV cartoons, objects on either side of the frame part to make way for the camera moving into the field towards a diegetically distant object. Often these effects occur only at the start of a film In short, multiplane operations are in no way central to cartoon space, and come to occupy circumscribed syntactical positions; they often have less to do with linear perspective than with production value, and less to do with realism than with highly stylized procedures

## 3.2. Other Processes

There are other processes in the cartoon which try to show depth of field through movement For example, the Fleischer studio in its last years (1935–42) developed a process in which

> a horizontal animation camera and stand were attached to an enormous revolving turntable, on which miniature sets were built. The characters were inked and painted on celluloids as always, but the cels were then suspended upright in a steel frame that revealed the 'live' backgrounds behind it Special machinery enabled the background to turn a tiny bit at a time, just as one would move a traditional paper background for a panning [sic] shot [23]

[23] cf Maltin *op cit*, p 113

The turntable method restricted camera use to lateral tracks, and the process itself was so expensive as to make its economic feasibility questionable and its use restricted [24] It was used in the studio's 'special' two-reel releases – for example, *Popeye the Sailor meets Sinbad the Sailor* (Fleischer, 1936) and *Popeye meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves* (Fleischer, 1937) *Sinbad*, pre-dating Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand, 1938), 'was treated as if it were a feature'.[25] Thus the generic liberty permitted a visual liberty Yet even here – for example, in *Ali Baba* – there are only four such sets, and whilst three are used for more than one shot, one of them extensively, normal painted backgrounds remain the basis of the film Indeed, a close track shot in this '3-D' process of Ali Baba's cave is set against a long shot painted rendition of the same scene. The two processes interact, and the effect is framed within and appropriated by normal cartoonal spatial articulation

[24] *ibid* p 114

[25] *ibid* p 112

Standard cartoons like *Learn Polikeness* (Fleischer, 1938) and *Betty Boop and the Little King* (Fleischer, 1936) also used this process, if less extensively Economic restraints led to syntactical circumscription akin to that described above with regard to the multiplane – *Learn Polikeness* has one such '3-D' shot, an establishing shot at the film's start Further, it would be problematic to claim that this process marries animated figures in a live-action setting to the cartoon genre Maltin suggests that audiences often don't realize that live-action has been used [26] This is because the representation of space is different to that in normal live-action The camera is much larger in relation to the (miniature) sets than it is in normal film, whilst the turntable moves the set around a specific central axis The result is that these shots are much more perspectivally forced than is normal film – too extreme a frame-by-frame recomposition of relative objects is just as different from live-action cinema as is its complete absence from the normal surface of the cartoon

[26] *ibid*  p 114

Another Fleischer process was 'rotoscoping' – the tracing of live-action onto cels This, however, was used for figure animation rather

than mise-en-scene, most extensively in the feature *Gulliver's Travels* (Fleischer, 1939) The only cartoon series that regularly used the process (again, only for figures) were the Fleischer *Superman* films, where the original strip-cartoon format with its successive frames motivates the use of a great many cuts rather than an attempt at complex camera movement.[27] Computer animation offers cel animation a similar process – the 'rotoscoping' of a computer-generated space, as it were – but such processes post-date the classical cartoon Where they are used in the service of a genre cartoon effect – most famously in the opening minutes of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* – it results in a specular exhilaration for the spectator precisely because such spatial fluidity is not normally expected in a cartoon.

27 cf ibid p 121

A more widespread practice, particularly in early cartoons, was what I shall term limited forward track animation (or the 'perspective run'), a process for the simulation of movement into the scene. This process centres the frame around a highly regulated, recessionary perspectival scene (a row of trees; a railway track) into which it moves, e g. **Figure 6.i**, derived from *Beep Prepared* (Jones, 1961). This *de rigeur* regularity indicates the restricted possibilities for the procedure's use. Further, any objects depicted on the horizon – here, the cityscape – do not draw nearer The strong linear perspective that facilitates the animation of the regular, approaching pattern also dictates that objects on a line from the vanishing point (the static marker around which all other relative distance is orientated) are noticeably excluded from the process (their animated approach being beyond the bounds of economic feasibility)

This problem can be avoided by making the receding space curved – i e a hill – as in **Figure 6.ii**, thus avoiding representation of the horizon. However the vanishing point still orients the space, and the effect is to abstract the curvature of the hill from its proper trajectory, such that it seems as though the camera is tracking over a large ball (or a very small planet) – a kind of convex version of the jog around the Jupiter craft in *2001 A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968). Alternatively, the curvature can be across the vertical axis (**Figure 6.iii** – derived from *Frigid Hare* [Jones, 1949]), where a similar problem pertains (the camera seems to go round and round a circular road) Use of two vertical bends results in an indescribably bizarre effect still more abstracted from the movement it is intended to represent. In short, this effect signifies (as an example) that 'we follow a figure as s/he walks down a path' without beginning to render an action in what normal cinema dictates is a realistic fashion

Other processes are similarly circumscribed, stereoscopic, '3-D' cartoons offer successive flat layers rather than a fully binocular image,[28] 'total' animation of the frame is restricted to very close
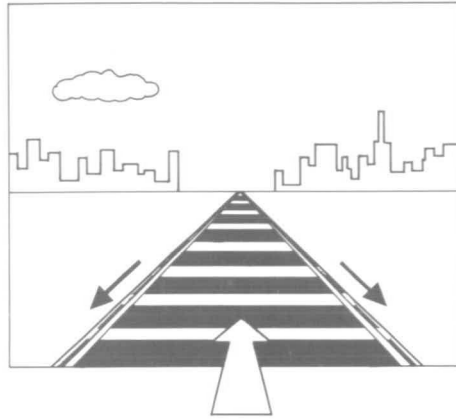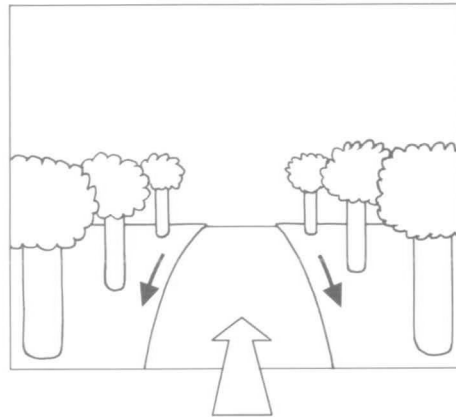
28 cf ibid p 179

**Figure 6i**
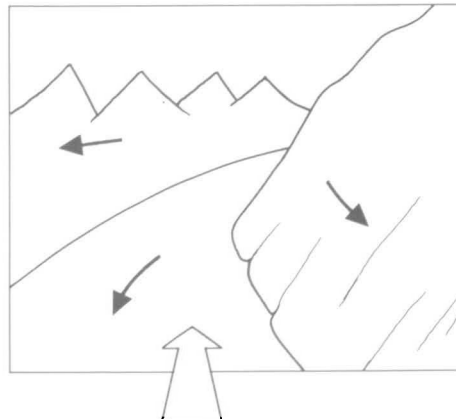


**Figure 6ii**



**Figure 6iii**

figure shots and 'subjective' effects which animate the phenomenal
nature of the surface rather than the depth of field represented
(Claude's awakening in *The Hypochondri-Cat* [Jones. 1950]). All
these processes take up positions with regard to normal cinematic

perspectival movement in order to achieve specific effects  None,
however, replicate it; all bear marks of the surface that they, in
particular respects, aim to disguise.

It remains for me to give a brief indication of the integration of
animation into the shot, and of the shot into the total film.

## 4.  The Animated Figure

### 4.1.  Figure in Motion

Within the mise-en-scene provided by the background, the action –
that which is animated – unfolds. As any cartoon progresses, it is
possible that any part of the screen may be used or moved in the
diegesis  It is the figure, centred by the frame, that proves to be the
diegetic locus of movement – it moves, uses props, and is the agent
of narrative progression. Just as the precise differentiation of
background and animation can occur only with a finite text, so
movement itself is bound at the production stage by extremes of
action  As Barrier puts it

> animation works on the principle that there is a hierarchy among
> drawings  Some are more important than others, because they
> define a particular movement .    The animators work within the
> guidelines established by the director's poses and the animators'
> assistants then work within the boundaries established by the
> animators' 'extremes' – the importance of the individual drawings
> varying with who has drawn them – director, animator, assistant
> or (lowest on the totem pole) 'in-betweener', who fills in the
> frames necessary to complete an action smoothly [29]

29 Mike Barrier "Jones 'Night
Watchman' to Phantom
Tollbooth  in *Funnyworld*
No 13 (1971) p 36

It should not of course be assumed from this that the cartoon
necessarily progressively delimits action to the shortest distance
between pictures  The animators 'do a lot more than fill in the gaps

30 *ibid*

between the director's drawings' [30] The animation is achieved with
regard to mood, personality, weight, as well as intentional style  Just
as fill drawings don't simply travel the shortest distance between two
poses in a given time (number of frames), so too, they don't simply
reproduce cinematic movement within these poses. The movement
must be expressive, but the main criterion is *intelligibility* rather than
similarity to live-action

Different animation styles tend to emphasize poses (Avery, e g.
*Red Hot Riding Hood* [1943], or Jones, e g. *My Bunny Lies Over
The Sea* [1948]) or else movement (Clampett, e g. *The Daffy Doc*
[1938], or Kinney's Goofy films) – or even a total seamlessness
where pose and 'fill' movement are indistinguishable ('the Disney
style'. Harman/Ising, etc.). Pose-oriented animation can use
extremes in outrageous, 'impossible' ways (Avery) or, conversely,
for the punctuation of moods and 'looks' which are closely

analogous to live-action (Jones, e.g. *Cheese Chasers*) Similarly, movement-oriented animation can emphasize impossible physical distortion (Clampett) or general stylistic plasticity – 'smear' animation – (Clampett, Freleng [e g *A Hare Grows in Manhattan* 1947], Jones' *The Dover Boys* [1942]), or else 'grace' and 'realistic' pseudo-photographic movement.

## 4.2. Representation and Identity of Figure

Just as the figure motivates the animation of the picture, so it exemplifies issues of representation and the relation of cartoons to live-action film This is true not simply in the limited sense of the actual particularity of the figure's representation – that intelligibility rather than cinematic (photographic) authenticity is the important factor, that Mr Magoo doesn't look like (a photograph of) a man but a drawing of one; or that Wile E Coyote is, strictly speaking, top heavy Rather, there is a broader respect in which the cartoon figure is an index of the issues of representation that we have encountered

For example, the Mickey Mouse of the late 1930's reflects this by default, by a textual disavowal This late Mickey lives a bourgeois life; he has a house and a dog (who is smaller than him); the only signs of his rodent nature are his ears The ultimate icon of the cartoon, he no longer needs to live like a cartoon animal, and instead represents more important cultural values The later Daffy Duck, exemplified in genre parodies like *Duck Dodgers in the 24½th Century* (Jones, 1953), is obsessed with asserting control and mastery over a situation He tries to be something he patently is not, a project at least analogous to the cartoon enterprise. Wile E Coyote is engaged in a continual struggle against annihilation Magoo relentlessly makes (non)sense of the indeterminate meaning of his surroundings Gerald McBoing Boing embodies a disparity of sound and image

Other characters confront issues of identity and environment by virtue of their mastery. Bugs' ability to be 'always in command, even in the face of gravest danger'[31] is as much a witness to questions of cartoon identity as it is to Daffy's inability to control events In *Duck Amuck*, Bugs is revealed as the enunciator/animator, manipulating the unreal cartoon, whilst Daffy is threatened and humiliated by this very unreality – transformed into a bizarre flower-monster, he is on the margins of existence, something that is and is not Daffy. Popeye's muscles transform into industrial engines or anvils – he becomes a metaphor for power.[32] Pepe le Pew is omnipotent, an overpoweringly amorous figure. Tweety and Droopy look feeble but prove to be indomitable In short, the cartoon character – occupying a space between person and non-person, as exemplified and indexed by the 'cartoon animal' – situates itself around questions of identity which, whilst common in

**31** Avery quoted in Patrick McGilligan Robert Clampett' in Peary Peary *op cit* p 155

**32** cf Michael Wassenaar 'Stong to the Finich Machines Metaphor and Popeye the Sailor' *The Velvet Light Trap*, No 24 (1989)

all comedy, acknowledge the disparity between diegetic depth of field and 'actual' surface. It is the cut which acts to dispel this disparity by accommodating the cartoon to dominant cinematic syntax.

## 5. Cutting and Narration

The particular character of cartoon cutting becomes clearer if we consider the cinematic cut as a useful elimination of camera movement between two points (a conception certainly present in many films, e g Hitchcock's *Rope* [1948]). Noel Burch has isolated three categories of spatial articulation afforded by the cut The first of these is continuous space, constituted by 'any change in angle or scale . . with relation to the same camera subject or within the same location or the same circumscribed space '[33] For my purposes I shall not allow that a cut which relates to a subject (figure) but not a location – e g , a match-cut where a figure is matched walking off into new space – constitutes a continuous cut, as it is the nature of the static space (background/location) and not the animated space (the subject/figure) which concerns me. The second category is adjacent space, where 'while showing a space different in every way from the space visible in shot A, shot B . . . is obviously in close *proximity* to the spatial fragment previously seen'. The third type is a cut to altogether discontinuous space. For cartoon and live-action alike, the camera cannot travel to altogether discontinuous space, and so both use the cut or its variants. Conversely, it is possible for both media to move to a proximate, adjacent space The cartoon, as we have seen, will play with such a progression in the disparity between the laterality of its movement and the often different diegetic location of the depicted space However, unlike live-action, the cartoon cannot move into a scene that is already on-screen without cutting (it can only move into the field; provide a detail; effectively, 'zoom') Here, then, the cartoon is least like live-action, the cut into an on-screen space reproduces story space whilst replacing surface space, and the disparity between the two is at its greatest

This structure of cutting may not have any apparent significance – for example, a cut into a scene is in no way problematic for the cinematically literate spectator – but it is, nevertheless, present in the spatial articulation of cartoons (after all, a production-line cartoon can only invest in a limited number of backgrounds). Different cartoons take up different positions towards it, *Puss Cafe* ignores it, establishing a consistent space with lots of cuts (90), *That's My Pup* establishes a general space which is not self-consistent in its specificity, as it compromises between cutting (43) and lateral tracking; *Trailblazer Magoo* relies almost totally on lateral movement into new space (only 27 cuts)

33 Noel Burch *Theory of Film Practice* (London Secker and Warburg 1973) p 9

The categories outlined in this paper can thus be used to help identify the status and use of the diegetic space of any cartoon, and therefore to analyse its narrative operations Without a framework to sustain such analysis, the praise given to cartoon directors like Tex Avery over the last fifteen years has been, at best, purely celebratory; and it is in the intersection and interaction of spatial and narrative codes that such a framework might prove most interesting The observations I have made are not intended as the basis of anything so grand as a 'general theory', but as a preliminary to the tracing of these 'intersections' in particular cartoons; a project which promises to yield results of a more concrete and subtle kind

# reports and debates

# British Film Institute: a response

## COLIN MACCABE

It is impossible to reply in full to the article
on the British Film Institute in the last issue
of *Screen*. The degree of rancour likely to be
engendered is not worth the minimal clarity
that might be produced. Rumours surround
institutions as part of their conditions of
existence, it is doubtful whether one can ever
do more than alter the rumours. Rather than
correct every speculation and inaccuracy it is
perhaps worth stating that the decision to
disband SEFT was taken long before Wilf
Stevenson became Director It had nothing
directly to do with him, or indeed with me

Nor do I have the stomach to take full
issue with the terms of the analysis The
authors of the piece have been friends and
collaborators through the past decade and I
hope that they will continue to be so in the
next I have no wish to contribute to a public
antagonism which would be personally
wounding and institutionally counter-
productive I cannot, however, restrain
myself from saying that to oppose
'enterprise' and 'public service' as the key
terms of an argument is to refuse the
pleasures of analysis for the comforts of
cliché The real questions concern the inter-
relation of markets and values and how to

affect those relations by various kinds of
regulation and subsidy It is those questions
which now preoccupy both the BFI and the
BBC. The article, itself, is perhaps a
symptom of how the universities have reacted
very differently from other public institutions
to the events and politics of the eighties and
how far they are from addressing the reality
of their own situation As a footnote it might
be added that the claim that the Museum is
not educational is equally revealing about the
universities' continuing inability to relate to
any other forms of education in this country.

Personal inclination aside, it is, however,
important to set the record straight on the
possibility of the BFI offering a Masters
degree When I took over the Research
Division of the BFI in June 1989 one of my
tasks was to investigate the possibility of the
Institute offering its own postgraduate
degrees It is largely my own fault that these
very preliminary investigations were
perceived in most of the higher educational
community as an established threat Because
our thinking was very tentative I did not
perceive the need to reassure our friends and
colleagues about our intentions. Now may be
a good opportunity to do so, particularly as

the Institute is now clear about what it would like to do (although there are still financial and organizational questions that have to be answered before a decision can be made).

The desire to consider such postgraduate degrees was part and parcel of a concern that the Institute should reproduce its own knowledges and expertise in a more formal way than the haphazard passing on of information and analysis from individual to individual. It was therefore always the case that what we were concerned to deliver was the establishment of a degree which would link theoretical and historical questions to the Institute's own practices as archive, museum, exhibition centre, distributor and producer. The fundamental purpose was thus always a taught Masters degree which would link theory and practice Fears have been expressed to me that such a degree would hog Institute resources in the Archive and the Library which are essential to others research. It should be made absolutely clear that any hypothetical students on the Institute Masters course would not have a privileged access to these resources. What they would have a privileged access to is the Institute's activities: that is to say to research placements in the different Institute's departments and divisions. It could theoretically be argued that these activities should be made available as a general public resource. Any such argument ignores the enormous practical difficulties. The Institute's departments and divisions are all engaged in their own urgencies and priorities and to construct educationally viable uses of these activities is still the major organizational difficulty confronting the proposed degree It is only internal organization which will allow these activities to become educational resources.

The other major worry that has been expressed is that this degree will be in competition with other such degrees which will thereby suffer While there will obviously be some degree of competition, it does not

follow that anybody necessarily suffers. It is certainly the case that any such course enjoys more, much more, than adequate demand. A course which would, at most, take twelve students a year, would not in any way affect student numbers in other courses, and it is probable that the establishment of such a degree would lead to an overall increase in demand

A much more realistic worry is not in terms of student numbers but of national resources for research. Film and television studies currently find themselves uncomfortably split between the British Academy and the ESRC and are inadequately financed by both. The Institute will be in the forefront of the arguments to improve the situation, but until it is improved it would be wrong for the Institute to take a major part of a very scarce resource The further developments of the Masters initiative not only depends on the organizational questions mentioned above and the crucial question of the institutional form of any such degree, but also on the raising of increased resources which would fund the students and thus the extra marginal cost of the activity

One question raised in the article which seems perfectly valid is the need to build a general regional component into the overall new focus of the Institute's research activities This may be best achieved by looking for university and polytechnic partners for various of our research programmes and perhaps even funding some PhD's with associated programmes.

# reports

**The 12th Créteil International Women's Film Festival**
**Créteil, 23 March – 1 April 1990**

THE 12th International Women's Film Festival remained faithful to its well-established formula of a cosmopolitan

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# reports

THE 12th International Women's Film Festival remained faithful to its well-established formula of a cosmopolitan

selection of new films – features, documentaries and shorts – in competition, and an array of thematic sections and archive retrospectives. This year, the latter were devoted to Latin American directors, Eastern Europe, women reporters, and the films of Muriel Box and Wendy Toye; altogether more than 150 films, spread over ten days and several venues in Créteil. Partly through contingencies (Claudia Cardinale, Gillian Armstrong, Kire Muratova were last minute cancellations) and partly through design (in the Latin American section for instance), 1990 Créteil went for coverage rather than 'stars'. This, in the eyes of organizers Jackie Buet and Elisabeth Tréhard, was a good test of the way the festival would fare in terms of French media coverage, traditionally only interested in big names and less than keen on any explicit feminist angle,[1] and, more to the point, whether this would have a detrimental effect on attendance. The answer seems to be that Créteil has by now managed to generate a faithful following, regardless of publicity, with a total audience in 1990 of about 35,000, on a par with last year, and a remarkable achievement compared with 3,000 when the festival started in Sceaux in 1979.

Going for coverage rather than a particular personal or thematic focus clearly serves a pedagogic role, as the Latin American and Eastern Europe sections showed. However, the amorphousness of the wide-ranging selection, apart from making for difficult reporting, raises two major questions related to the nature and function of a 'women's film festival'. The first one is a historical point. Has Créteil, in its 12 years of existence, sufficiently fulfilled one basic aim of feminist film history, that is, the retrieval of figures suppressed, ignored, or down-played by standard film history? To put it bluntly, has Créteil now 'done' all the major figures in the feminist film canon? As the enthusiastic reception given to Muriel Box and Wendy Toye showed, there is still scope for the highlighting of figures who may have

achieved recognition in their own country but are still unknown outside. Besides, the feminist canon which has willy-nilly developed over the last 20 years is itself in need of a challenge, for example in terms of its concentration on white American and European filmmakers, and in its exclusively *auteurist* focus on directors. But the fact remains that there is now an ever-diminishing number of possible individual 'major discoveries' to be made. The second point is the old question of specificity, one raised each year at Créteil and yet never properly debated, for lack of a theoretical forum. Apart from the initial premise of selecting films because their directors are *female*, a massive event like Créteil pinpoints the question of a 'feminine' specificity in works where there is no obvious feminist ideology at work.

This last point was particularly highlighted by the French women reporters' section, where a number of films focused on



Muriel Box
(Courtesy of the BFI stills archive)

traditional 'women's subjects' – women and Islam, children, women and war, abortion, etc. – but many others dealt with non-gendered topics. Indeed, some women reporters obviously explored 'masculine' subjects to prove the basic point that 'women can do it too!' As Dann Loustallot put it, 'at first, they said well done, you've worked like a bloke'.[2] Within this perspective, Marianne and Catherine Lamour's documentary on the opium 'Golden triangle' (*L'Héroine du triangle d'or*, 1975) makes sense. The film is in pursuit not only of the origins and political implications of international drugs traffic, but also of a journalistic scoop, an interview with the head of the secret Chinese army in exile. The emphasis on 'the political' is, one cannot help feeling, a defence against being categorized, precisely, as a 'woman director', and a lot of emphasis is placed, in Lamour's



Wendy Toye
(Courtesy of the BFI stills archive)

film, on the physical hardship that the job entails. Though Marianne Lamour claims a feminine perspective on her material ('A man would have dealt with the subject in a very didactic manner. I showed what I saw and what I lived, life on a daily basis'), and she prominently features herself in what is a very 'first person' documentary, the apparent lack of interest in women's lives in the Golden Triangle is surprising, particularly since we are shown a tantalizing glimpse of women harvesting the poppy fields. Women reporters have come a long way, and French audiences, as in most western countries, have become accustomed to women covering hard news on television. However, as recently as 1987, out of 394 registered film reporters in France, only 11 were women. Thus, given the extreme difficulty women have in penetrating such a male preserve, one should not be surprised that their first preoccupation is to fit in with the professional ideology and generic features of their chosen medium, rather than to set a different ideological agenda. If further proof was needed, it could be found in the documentaries of Louise Weiss and Titayna – actually two real Créteil 'discoveries'.

Titayna (Elisabeth Sauvy), a journalist, aviatrix and novelist, was in the mould of the dashing pioneers of the 1930s. Indeed, 50 years before Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Amy!*, an atlas map and newspaper headlines chart the progress of Titayna through China in her documentary *Promenade en Chine*. This film, made in 1933 (and one of three films she directed) shows her elegantly paddling in rice fields, holding her couture dress in one hand and high heeled shoes in the other. Though hers was no mean achievement (most of the documentary was shot in defiance of a ban on filming in China) her view of China – the beauty of its art and 'otherness' of its people – fits in with the fashion for exoticism and the 'colonial' genres of the French cinema of the period; at one point a journey down the

Louise Weiss shooting *Les Caravaniers de la Lune* (1952)
(Courtesy of the author and Films de Femmes)

Yangtse river on a French navy ship is turned into an elegant cruise romance with a Vincent Scotto ballad played on a gramophone.

Louise Weiss, an exceptional personality but a conformist filmmaker, poses even more acutely the problem of retrieving such figures for a feminist re-examination. Weiss, an intellectual and journalist, founded a pacifist journal, *L'Europe nouvelle*, in 1918, and in the 1930s was one of the most active militant feminists in France. She founded a feminist journal called *La Femme nouvelle* and later joined the resistance and campaigned for a unified Europe. A documentary about her provided fascinating information on a little-known episode of the feminist struggle in France – such as the opening of her feminist boutique on the Champs-Elysées in 1934, and her participation in suffragette demonstrations (French women did not obtain the vote until 1945). Hers was definitely a high society feminism (throwing face powder at policeman in order to blind them) but one that shrewdly recognized the importance of media visibility and of establishing the 'respectability' of the

feminist struggle. Her reporting with glee that a gendarme said of her in the middle of a riot 'I can't arrest her, her clothes come from Molyneux!' may seem frivolous, but her published books and memoirs testify to the seriousness of her commitment. Her documentaries, directed in the 1950s, are therefore all the more disappointing. Technically accomplished, they are marred by the booming male voice-over typical of French documentaries of the period. The treatment of their subjects – societies ranging from Syria to Japan – shows an uneasy mixture of genuine ethnographic interest and naïve cultural imperialism, both in the choice of images and the voice-over commentary, but are, again, within the rules of the genre prevalent at the time.

Turning to the new feature films in competition, their major trait was diversity rather than any dominant theme, not surprising since part of Buet and Tréhard's selection criteria are to give a representative sample of women's cinema in the world. Perhaps a major dividing line is between women directors who work within the dominant idiom in their respective countries and are addressing a national audience (on film or television), and those who work within a more international 'art house' style. In the former category was a superb Indian melodrama, *Rihaee* by Patil Arunaraje, which mobilizes the classic features of the Hindi melodrama to address the blatant sexism of Indian society; it was only a pity the director had cut all the song and dance sequences in order to 'westernize' the film for distribution. Also in a fairly classical narrative mode was Beeban Kidron's *Oranges are not the only fruit*, the adaptation of Jeanette Winterson's novel shot for the BBC, which won the Public's prize, and Rebecca Yates and Glen Salzman's *Milk and Honey*, a 'happy end' Canadian melodrama of cultural and racial integration (the actress Josette Simon won the best actress prize).

The latest Kira Muratova film, *The*

*Asthenical Syndrom*, on the other hand, was in the category of the more consciously 'art' film. Muratova has now made a name for herself on the festival circuit since her major discovery outside Russia in the wake of glasnost *The Asthenical Syndrom* is a long, dense and difficult (though rewarding) work which, like all her previous films, has been in trouble with Soviet authorities. This is not surprising as it is, of all her films, the one that most directly addresses the state of contemporary Russian society, needless to say in an unflattering light But it would be unilluminating to reduce the film to a sociological statement. *The Asthenical Syndrom* is also a remarkable stylistic play on representations of reality, for instance, the bleached black and white first section which depicts the agony of a recently widowed woman, is a self-conscious reference to the European art film of the 1960s and its 'psychological realism' *The Asthenical Syndrom* was awarded the Special Jury prize, while the prize for best feature went, as is often the case at Créteil, to a stylistically more conventional film, in this case *Memoirs of a River* by Judit Elek, a polished Franco-Hungarian television co-production about anti-semitism in Hungary in the 1880s

Rather than go on to give a meaningless list of titles, I will only cite two more that seemed to me of particular interest One was Magdalena Lazarkiewicz's *The Last Bell* which, like Muratova's film, is clearly meant to be read as a statement on Poland's present situation (though presumably shot before the major events of 1989), here dynamically related through a group of teenagers doing drama at school. The film contains a lot of the narrative clichés of high-school dramas – repressive teachers, classroom confrontations, etc. – but the play-within-the-film, itself a reflection on image manipulation, makes it into a sophisticated exploration of how to represent a politically charged historical moment Finally, Elisabeth Kapnist's short fiction film, *Trilogy* (which won the prize for

best French short) combines clear feminist issues (each part of the 'trilogy' focuses on the heroine's conflictual and/or illuminating encounters with her daughter. her husband. and an older woman friend) with startling stylistic virtuosity and a rather rare commodity in the Créteil films this year humour

As befits the national stereotype, it was left to two British women to supply most of the humour Whether they worked within the mainstream comedy genres of the British cinema of the 1950s, as in *Simon and Laura* (Box, 1955) or *Raising a Riot* (Toye, 1955) or in the more Surrealist vein of *The Stranger Left No Card* (Toye, 1952), Toye and Box's 'very British' humour (as the Créteil publicity put it) was much appreciated, as was their more serious sociological work (like Box's *Street Corner*, 1953) Along with a few other British women's output, Wendy Toye and Muriel Box's work has been re-appraised in Britain in the last ten years – through screenings at the NFT and women's events like the Norwich Women's Film Weekend, and the television series *Fifties Features*, but was virtually unknown in France. Hence the section 'enthusiasms' which featured them this year at Créteil fulfilled a real gap in history for French audiences who were able, at last, to 'study, from a radically new perspective, the British cinema of the post-war period, and the part played by these two important filmmakers', as Caroline Merz put it in her text for the festival catalogue [3] Each of the two directors was represented by four films, and a major coup was that both attended the festival in person Though the films initially could have been difficult for non-British audiences unfamiliar with the British cinema of the 1950s (over-head translation and sub-titles do little justice to puns, accents, and verbal humour), word-of-mouth quickly made the section into a popular one, helped by the charismatic presence of both directors. When one young French woman in the audience told Wendy

Toye 'to see you in person makes one want to see your films', it was a reminder that one of the functions of women's festivals is, after all, the chance for both producers and consumers of films to meet in a fruitful manner As Agnès Varda put it, 'The Créteil festival is the showcase for a cinema that is not generally well-known, that you can't see at Cannes, Venice, or Berlin. It is no more artificial and no more of a ghetto than festivals of Nordic or American cinema. In the cinema of any country there are as many diversities and as many recurrent features. You find at Créteil an atmosphere once familiar exchanges between professionals and free debate'.[4]

*Ginette Vincendeau*

1   See Ginette Vincendeau, Women as *auteur-e-s* Screen vol 27 no 3/4 1986 pp 156–162 Women s cinema Film Theory and Feminism in France *Screen* vol 28 no 4 1987, pp 4–28, and Creteil 10 years on *Screen* vol 29 no 4 1988 pp 128–132
2   Dan Loustallot *XIIe Festival International de Films de Femmes,* catalogue, 1990, p 108
3   Creteil catalogue (op cit see note 2 above) p 95
4   Agnes Varda interviewed in *Le Monde* 21 April 1990

## Cultural Studies – now and in the future
## University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana)
## 5 April–9 April 1990

ANY conference that sets out to make a spectacle of itself deserves to be haunted. In the five days that several hundred people spent conjuring the spirit of Cultural Studies, many ghosts crossed through the hall, not all of them happily. These spectres – of history, of Otherness, of the so-called real world – managed, without being too dramatic about it, to steal the show

It is obvious that the entire conference was organized to summon up a single apparition, Cultural Studies capitalized. as a 'new' discipline fully legitimized in the eyes of the North American University and its various practitioners alike The conference was designed as a ceremony of setting agendas

and enforcing definitions, as an act of selective gathering and monumental display. Henceforth there would be no more doubt that the thing exists Cultural Studies lives, it was born in Birmingham and reborn, twenty years on, in Champaign-Urbana

No organizers, not even the audacious and talented Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler and Linda Baughman, could hope to make such an apparition hold up. Cultural Studies would not be captured, institutionalized, so easily too many people have too much at stake to let a mere conference impose its parameters and protocols This is where the first ghost enters: the ghost of the Book, the volume of conference proceedings to be collected and issued along with transcriptions of discussion periods. At times it seemed as if the conference were simply a dress rehearsal for the Book, a kind of living editing session. But of course there will be more editing later things will be cut, selected, added and dropped. It is hard to imagine that the stuttering, practically inarticulate question from a woman after the AIDS panel will ever see print, just as it was hard to avoid the suspicion that the two-way radios worn by the moderators and organizers were used for anything but conveying instructions on who should be allowed to ask a question from the audience As long as the ghost of the Book-to-Come remained, access to the microphones entailed nothing less than who would or would not participate in 'the future' of Cultural Studies. As it turned out, a major challenge from the floor seized on exactly this point Grossberg responded that such a conference inevitably brings contradictions (indeed): a compromise was apparently reached later, when the organizers/editors agreed to include a collectively-written critique in the final product And so in the end it was still the Book which remained the principal site of struggle, as if that were the main place where Cultural Studies would make its mark.

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This episode speaks directly to the politics of Cultural Studies as conceived by this event· namely, what, if any, are there? Here we encounter another ghost called *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, a previous conference-turned-book staged in the same place by some of the same organizers in 1983 and published in 1988 This massive volume, best recognized as the Big Red Book of leftist cultural criticism, announced that Marxism occupied the 'centre' of emerging discourses about culture, demonstrating the point in over 700 pages of generally excellent theoretical writing. While the example of this book still loomed large in 1990, Marxism itself was not much of a name to conjure with, it was not the primary political currency in circulation, let alone the 'central' one Furthermore it was not possible to refer to 'the politics of Cultural Studies' without a certain indeterminacy. For example, A I D S activism was placed solidly on the agenda by Jan Zita Grover and Douglas Crimp, who took pains to politicize rather than 'culturalize' the issue. When political economy came up, it was in the context of talks about space, media space and financial space, by Jody Berland and Meaghan Morris. When Homi Bhabha and Lata Mani spoke of the problem of 'social agency' in colonialism and its aftermath, their vocabulary was sampled from feminism, poststructuralism and Subaltern Studies At best, these were the politics of the psychedelic rainbow coalition evoked by Donna Haraway, at worst, it was errant radicalism, all woof and no weave

Several shades of theory contended. Many speakers chose to chew the tasty Gallic cud of Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (in roughly that order) Indeed, the shade of de Certeau was a major surprise guest, as he seemed to rival Raymond Williams as the patron saint of the proceedings De Certeau was cited with a regularity and a depth that befits a *bona fide*

founder of discourse. John Fiske performed the lengthiest acts of piety, invoking de Certeau's work as the beginning of a 'science of the particular'. (At this point Rosalind Brunt made a timely reminder that Lenin, too, sought a 'science of the concrete ' Henri Lefebvre, who is both a dialectician and analyst of everyday life, was sorely missed here ) This tendency – like de Certeau both poetic and covertly theological – regards the semiotic 'density' of everyday life, the abyss of specificity, as the proper object of Cultural Studies At moments, both Graeme Turner's paper on Australian film and Iain Chambers' videotape shared this perspective

In a vastly different spirit, Constance Penley, Donna Haraway and Andrew Ross also enlisted as partisans of the forgotten pleasures of the banal Yet here the discoveries (from Star Trekdom, *National Geographic* and the New Age industry) were laid out with a degree of textual detail and interpretive rigour In these papers, everyday discourse is not unveiled as a key to an ineffable, unquenchable resistance, but precisely as a *series of problems* for the older kinds of analysis, as challenges to the machinery of psychoanalysis, semiotics and ideological critique. As such, they were the conference's best examples of the vanishing art of specific reading, examples of cultural study as the formulation of necessary questions Kobena Mercer posed a somewhat different sort of puzzle at the conclusion of his paper, where a reading of Enoch Powell's speeches brought up some disturbingly familiar parallels to leftist political rhetoric lest it be forgotten, the right also builds its coalitions around the slogans of 'community' Mercer's argument should put a scare in the optimists of resistance hermeneutics

Janice Radway's paper on the commodification of popular reading practices shared something with these papers, both in its closely-argued quality and in its skepticism about the salvational overtones of some Cultural Studies But Radway also

summoned up another paradigm rarely seen at such conferences· American Studies, the sometimes-underground radical tradition that has (as Michael Denning has argued) haunted the mainstream American academy since the late 1940s. Radway's version does not practice the covert Marxism of earlier days, nevertheless, her feminist cultural criticism draws from the same populist empiricism and theoretical pragmatism, making it tangibly different from Birmingham-derived work When Rosalind Brunt questioned the value of Radway's kind of research, it was a quiet but significant moment of clashing paradigms Brunt takes the basic question 'what do people do with the text?' and adds '. in the real world?' – which might sound superfluous or overemphatic to practitioners of American Studies, who never stopped talking about the real world anyway. For her part, Radway focussed her paper through the pedagogical and axiological concerns that are becoming key issues in contemporary American theory In the British context, however, the insistence on a return to 'the real world' signals the painful and lingering scars of poststructuralist corrosion, which so much of contemporary Cultural Studies seeks to heal through the rigours of audience research

Raymond Williams, meanwhile, served as a guarantor of 'sociological', or what in this context used to be called Marxist approaches to literature (as in Peter Stallybrass' fine discussion of etymology and 'individuality' in Shakespeare) and art (as in Janet Wolff's discussion of interdisciplinary possibilities in art history) In fact, Stallybrass' paper, which shared a session with Ian Hunter's detailed reading of German aesthetics as an ethical project, demonstrated better than anybody else that a literary analysis guided by Williams was no more antiquarian and no less theoretically acute about matters of subjectivity and historical specificity than a genealogical method. Yet here and elsewhere, Williams exerted a benign

influence without providing any specific theoretical tools. Only the very last session, with papers by Carolyn Steedman and Catherine Hall, started to make an assessment of Williams' historic impact on the basic paradigm under construction

It fell to Stuart Hall to provide the theoretical, ethical and political centre of gravity he was scheduled in a special session on Sunday, in a slot guaranteed to draw the biggest crowd (upwards of 700) His elegant retelling of the story of the Birmingham school bore witness to the difficulties of mediating between political action, institutional critique and theoretical research His continued emphasis on Gramsci's work carried two messages: first, the assertion (against the overall indifference mentioned above) of Marxist paradigms, even as they are 'displaced' by Cultural Studies, second, the importance of defining *intellectual* tasks as distinct from *academic* ones (a useful recasting of Gramsci's separation of the traditional and organic functions) Hall, the conference's most generous spirit, also spoke clearly to the widespread anxiety that Birmingham had been promoted as the ur-version of Cultural Studies, and instead offered a modest assessment of the Centre's achievements and failures It was a kind of cautionary tale against professionalization, against rank pluralism, against isolation A ghost story for the new New Left

In the narrative of the conference, however, this was the perfect moment for the protest against celebrity-style presentation, the exhausting schedule and the absence of alternative spaces (Everybody knows that the important work of conferences goes on in the lobby, during the gaps between papers ) Calls were made for workshop-sized sessions and democracy of the microphones Omissions of all kinds were read into the record. Stuart Hall waited while the organizers answered the challenges, but his question time was used up That evening's session, moderated by Bell Hooks, proved to

be a turn-around As soon as Paul Gilroy
began his paper on the 'Atlanticism' of
African American history with a solid minute
of Soul II Soul groove, some of the angry
demons fled Then Cornel West's glowing
celebration of culture and Cultural Studies (a
paean to Sarah Vaughn and Stuart Hall,
among others) added to the sense that
something might be saved after all:
commitment and affirmation as the fighting
virtues of the postmodern intellectual

But even if Hall and West were able to
make a case for intellectual engagement in
the specific language of Cultural Studies and
leftist politics, the conference programme did
not give non-academic cultural producers
much chance for expression and dialogue. No
writers, poets or artists spoke. Three
videotapes (by Laura Kipnis, Iain Chambers
and Steve Fagin) were screened But they
were marginalized in a precise sense
squeezed in a small room or in a small time
slot, the videos proved more difficult to catch
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*Richard Dienst*

**Cultural Studies Conference Sheffield City
Polytechnic 7–8 April 1990**

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Perhaps not surprisingly, the notion of
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A second theme mapped out by the
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be a turn-around As soon as Paul Gilroy began his paper on the 'Atlanticism' of African American history with a solid minute of Soul I I Soul groove, some of the angry demons fled Then Cornel West's glowing celebration of culture and Cultural Studies (a paean to Sarah Vaughn and Stuart Hall, among others) added to the sense that something might be saved after all: commitment and affirmation as the fighting virtues of the postmodern intellectual

But even if Hall and West were able to make a case for intellectual engagement in the specific language of Cultural Studies and leftist politics, the conference programme did not give non-academic cultural producers much chance for expression and dialogue. No writers, poets or artists spoke. Three videotapes (by Laura Kipnis, Iain Chambers and Steve Fagin) were screened But they were marginalized in a precise sense squeezed in a small room or in a small time slot, the videos proved more difficult to catch than any of the papers It's a shame: each was a serious work that addressed the basic concerns of the conference (Kipnis' tape was a witty parable of right-wing women, Fagin's long work adopted cable-tv rhythms in a sometimes gruesome account of recent Philippene history; Chambers' clip sounded like cut-up Baudrillard and looked like channel-zapping Italian TV.) The fate of these presentations hints that Culture itself, even when it's theory-friendly, has become a kind of spectre elusive, inaccessible, something we'd have to go away and think about later.

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need to account for 'points of commonality' in the struggle to dismantle the centres.

The main body of the conference was divided into four workshops, each of which in turn sub-divided into several sessions. As we are unable to do justice here to the wide range of issues elaborated upon by workshop participants, our discussion is limited to those impressions we consider to be particularly suggestive of certain overall trends.

First, the respective themes of the four workshops may be distinguished as follows Workshop One offered presentations on the constitution of feminine identity in fiction (Catherine Belsey, Clare Hanson), representations of national identity in the Irish literary revivals (Shaun Richards) and Scottish television advertising (Gordon Simpson), and myths of community in the 'new' Glasgow (Ian Spring). The second workshop consisted of reports addressing topics as diverse as. the construction of national identity in literature (Terry Lovell); the role of a cultural avant garde in the 'New Times' (Rod Jones), and the 'intermittent malaise of Scottishness' (Neil Blain).

Workshop Three was comprised of papers looking at questions such as· the positioning of 'English' as a national object (Kay Richardson); lineage and identity (Jill McKenna); the 'unbelonging of Mary Kingsley' (Lynnette Turner), Victorian writing and 'African eating' (Tim Youngs), fictional images of vampires and aliens (Jenny Wolmark, Carolyn Brown), and cult media (Nickianne Moody, Sean Cubitt). The final workshop featured discussions of. memory work and personal history (Marion McMahon, Lola Young), educated working class women and identity (Valerie Walkerdine), the teaching of 'race' (Joseph Bristow), the issue of heritage in lesbian and gay oral history (Margot Farnham); and, lastly, defining Australianess (James Swinson, Jane Madsen)

Given that our previous experience of academic conferences has been defined

within a North American context, we found the workshop format quite refreshing in that it was conducive to genuine dialogue. Accordingly, our sense of the likely direction of British Cultural Studies for the 1990s, as formulated in the presentations we attended, was equally shaped by how these views were contested by our fellow listeners To the extent that we can speak of conceptual trajectories, then, there appeared to be a general consensus that the 'turn to Gramsci' of the last decade notwithstanding, attempts to chart a path between, on the one hand, the culturalist paradigm's privileging of the expression of the authentic interests and values embodied in the lived experience of subordinate social groups and classes, and on the other hand, the structuralist emphasis on individuals as interpellated subjects reproducing hierarchical social relations, have reached a *cul-de-sac* The polarity remains as sharply defined as ever, with most of the papers we heard falling neatly into the culturalist camp

In strategic terms these analyses offered, at best, a vestigial loyalty to an actual interventionist project Despite the consensual erosion of Thatcherism, the politics of the popular seem to dictate that attention focus on how best to 'modify' or 're-negotiate' existing social divisions. Much was made of a perceived need to find something more positive to say about the mobility of identity, the ways in which individuals are adapting to the fluidity of the cultural forms routinely encountered in everyday life A commonly expressed fear was that somehow Cultural Studies research, with its 'unnecessarily obfuscatory language', has simply travelled too far down the path of most resistance The buzz-word on the tip of numerous tongues was 'ethnography', ostensibly the potential panacea for the conceptual headaches caused by undigested or, as several participants sought to argue, quite undigestible critical theory

This last trend underpins Brian Doyle's

editorial in the first issue of the ACS's new Magazine of Cultural Studies (MOCS), officially launched at this conference. Doyle claims that Cultural Studies has spent 'an inordinate amount of time and space exchanging "awfuls". Especially, "isn't ideology awful" – "isn't it awful that there is no escape from ideology except through the never-ending game of unmasking yet another of its devilishly subtle devices!" Are we to continue to list the sins committed by ideology on true culture, or true politics?' (1990· 3) He then suggests that 'maybe we shouldn't even bother to continue to talk about culture at all if our terms can't be used to predict what'll happen next time? I would like to propose this as a challenge not only to MOCS contributors, but to all students of culture' (1990· 3). Given that the stated aim of MOCS is to provide a critical, accessible and responsive forum for intervention into current debates. Doyle's challenge will no doubt be answered in a vigorous fashion Next year's ACS conference promises to be a lively event

*Stuart Allan* and *Cynthia Carter*

# reviews

## review article:

**Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Parallax: Revisions of Culture and Society). Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 239 pp.**

### ALAN DURANT

THE works generally attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin (including *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *Rabelais and his World*, and the collection of essays, *The Dialogic Imagination*) are widely recognized to be of major importance for cultural criticism. So too are those works Bakhtin almost certainly worked on, but which are not so widely attributed to him *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, usually attributed to V. N Volosinov, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, usually attributed to P. M. Medvedev; and others What inspires this interest in Bakhtinian ideas in much recent work in literary and cultural studies is that Bakhtin's concepts (of the dialogic, of heteroglossia, of carnival and polyphony, and so on) offer suggestive frameworks for thinking about the complex and contradictory interpretative possibilities which surround texts how they are read and re-read in different and often incompatible ways in relation to specific contexts, heterogeneous audiences, and conflicting social attitudes and ideologies.

In Bakhtin's writings, consideration of such variation and conflict in interpretation is premissed on the assumption that meaning is *always and in principle* something dynamic and variable that is constructed between socially determined participants in a situated interaction· utterances are only interpretable relative to earlier works with which they are in dialogue, and in anticipation of specific audiences and contexts of reception. Since the contexts in which meanings are produced for texts are generally also spheres of social conflict, issues of language and meaning have deep and investigable connections with other levels of social structure. Bakhtin's work is in

this respect centrally concerned not only with the complex and contradictory meanings and possibilities of language itself, but implicitly also with other kinds of social meanings. those of other types of text, including media texts, as well as those of sexuality, social attitudes, and other aspects of cultural life Politically, as a result – given that his work frequently subverts an apparent stability of meanings, and redefines notions of centre and margins – Bakhtin's ideas can be construed as connecting with broader analyses of cultural hegemony. His notions of heteroglossia and dialogism, in particular. suggest possibilities for the subversion of hegemonic cultural practices: since the world of texts and meanings is essentially conflictual, it is possible – even despite the pervasive influence of modern, capitalist mass cultural forms – to read persistently against the grain and in the margins of dominant modes of cultural production, and so to celebrate, through laughter, through expressions of marginalized sexuality and through carnivalesque, a variety of forms of alternative, opposition and resistance

Robert Stam's *Subversive Pleasures* takes its cue from these general insights and enthusiasms It stresses that Bakhtinian categories 'display an intrinsic identification with difference and alterity, a built-in affinity for the oppressed and the marginal, a feature making them especially appropriate for the analysis of opposition and marginal practices, be they Third World, feminist, or avant-garde' (p 21) This specific commitment to minority practices and resistance is linked to a more general counter-hegemonic politics for academic cultural studies, which seeks to deconstruct dominant or central definitions and meanings. thereby also revealing the otherwise unacknowledged suppressive tendency inherent in the way centre and margins are initially defined

*Subversive Pleasures* outlines its aim as being that of applying Bakhtinian categories to a wide corpus of films, TV programmes and other texts, to show how such categories can illuminate issues in their production. distribution and interpretation Beyond describing and illustrating each major concept in turn. however, the book also pursues a more general theoretical aim· that of showing how 'by shifting attention away from the abstract system of *langue* to the concrete heterogeneity of *parole*, Bakhtin suggests the dialogical nature of language, its constantly changing relationship to power, and thus points to the possibility of reappropriating its dynamism in the world' (p 84) In this way. not only are Bakhtinian categories to be outlined and applied; they are also to have their significance for a new and revitalized project of cultural analysis demonstrated.

Stam's reason for focusing on Bakhtin's work in particular as signalling this potentiality for a new order of cultural studies (when, as he also argues, Bakhtin's ideas intersect with concepts in Kristeva, Metz, Gramsci. and many others) is that Bakhtin can be

seen, historically, as an anticipatory or prefigurative thinker. With others in post-Revolution Leningrad, he was engaged – very loosely contemporaneously with the early Saussureans and the Russian Formalists – in working out new modes of analysis of language and meaning based on a recognition that language and other signs function as complex synchronic systems  But, more than the other linguists of that period, according to Stam, Bakhtin has a special importance today: it is in his work alone that the issue of meaning as 'the ongoing and reciprocally modifying interpersonal exchange of historical subjects' (p 5), continually defined and redefined through conflicts and in relation to specific sets of social conditions, is seriously addressed. From the very beginnings of modern critical work, then, Bakhtin's thinking outlined an alternative direction for semiological and cultural analysis – a direction which was subsequently obscured by structuralism but which can now be reclaimed and refashioned into a new programme for cultural studies, free from either Marxist determinism or Frankfurt School pessimism  Bakhtin, in effect, was historically marginalized; but his return from the margins shows up limitations in dominant paradigms of linguistic and cultural analysis, and can help to overcome many of the problems of current theoretical work

This special role for Bakhtin has to be energetically canvassed, nevertheless, if (as Stam rather strangely suggests) Bakhtin's work is still undervalued in contemporary academic circles  *Subversive Pleasures* takes as one of its tasks, therefore, the aim of showing how topics which Bakhtin himself did not explore can nonetheless be investigated in ways which are compatible with his general approach: 'Although Bakhtin does not speak directly to Third World or minoritarian concerns, for example, his categories are eminently well-suited to them, offering a corrective to certain Eurocentric prejudices.     Although Bakhtin seldom speaks specifically of the oppression of women, similarly his work can thus be seen as intrinsically open to feminist inflection' (p. 22); 'Bakhtin too, I think, could subscribe to this interest in spectatorial participation'. (p. 55) In this programmatic context, ideas of historical authorship appear unimportant  Accordingly, Stam steps over such problematic issues, by acknowledging that he uses the name Bakhtin 'stenographically', to refer to a circle of close collaborators (p  3), it is in the Bakhtinian spirit, he explains, to be more concerned with the multiple meanings and intertextual resonances of texts than with their writers as individuals. Rather than the works of a particular author, readers of *Subversive Pleasures* are invited to consider the significance of a body of theoretical work, and to assess a new approach and methodology for cultural studies in general.

It is this concern with Bakhtin's writing as an important body of theory which is most significant in *Subversive Pleasures*  But large scale theoretical discussion is combined with local comments on

individual texts. The book contains interesting observations and details (for example, on how texts such as posters are carefully placed in film images but then marginalized by the process of subtitling) The section on filmic carnivalesque is illuminating, in part because an attempt is made to construct a set of criteria for deciding whether something is 'carnivalesque' or not (pp 110–11); and the historical account of the functions of carnivalesque, juxtaposing carnival traditions with details of the neglect and misunderstanding of those traditions and describing the use of carnivalesque as subversion especially by women (p. 120ff), provides useful background for later commentary on genres of film and television comedy and satire. Local insights such as these show how Bakhtin's work can serve to persuade readers and viewers to engage with issues of conflict and contradiction inherent in the meanings produced for film, television and dramatic texts.

In common with much use of Bakhtinian concepts in media and cultural studies, nevertheless, two main difficulties with Stam's approach remain. The first problem lies in the use of Bakhtin as a representative of what linguistic analysis should be, and as a corrective to what it is assumed linguistics currently is. Comments along these lines typically show (and *Subversive Pleasures* fits this pattern) a basic lack of conversancy with linguistics. Linguistics moved away fundamentally from structuralism – in the sense that Stam uses the term – almost half a century ago (especially as a result of two paradigm shifts of the 1950s: Chomsky's concerning syntactic structure, and Grice's with regard to meaning and implication). It is quite possible still to criticize modern linguistic work (on, say, language acquisition, language change, pidginization, and other areas concerned with the relationship between structure and either time, regional variation, or social stratification); but to dismiss linguistic work as being concerned with structure in hopeless separation from ideas of change or heterogeneity by reference to the Saussurean model alone is like measuring contemporary cinema with a yardstick taken from silent films. There is a considerable amount of work in discourse stylistics of the media which relates disparate and often contradictory audience responses to features of texts and their systems of address, as well as to specific circumstances of reception and ideology. As regards forms of literary analysis, too, Bakhtin's innovative work has to be seen alongside other traditions of investigating historical conflicts over meaning and interpretation· the studies, for example, of key words and concepts of culture and society in the work of Raymond Williams (astonishingly not indexed – astonishing especially given the subtitle of the series in which the book appears 'Re-visions of Culture and Society') Even in the composition of the Oxford English Dictionary, a basic notion of heteroglossic, competing simultaneous senses linked to the social circulation of words and meanings, is recognized – if undeveloped

The relationship of Bakhtinian ideas to the history of work on linguistic meaning presented in *Subversive Pleasures* appears, as a result of such omissions, merely simplistic and ill-informed

The second area of difficulty in Bakhtinian approaches to cultural studies is the repeated praise for Bakhtinian concepts on grounds of their flexibility and openness As well as signifying polysemanticity and generosity, 'broadness' of concepts can signal imprecision and limited usefulness Bakhtin's ideas take the form of general statements; but these statements are often inconsistent with one another, and formulated in simplistic ways, often as sets of overlapping dichotomies Although Bakhtin places conflict at the centre of questions of meaning, there is no real suggestion in his work as to how precisely to study the multiaccentuality, or conflictual character, of signs (and Bakhtin's own preferred examples, concerning intonation, do not in themselves justify enthusiasm for the concept) Similarly, at some points in Bakhtin's writings it is suggested that dialogism is a property of all utterances, yet at other points it is presented as a unique and special quality of novels (for Stam's discussion of this problem, see p 188). Certainly, the generality of Bakhtinian concepts is likely to enhance their compatibility with other traditions of work in cultural studies ('A Bakhtinian approach is in this sense quite compatible with the feminist critique of Freudianism . .' (p 6) ). But equally, it can weaken the concepts' precision and effectivity, for example when Bakhtin's arguments are described as being 'rather like musical leitmotivs (in keeping with Bakhtin's notorious fondness for musical metaphors)' (p. 23); or when Bakhtin's mere 'predilection for aural and musical metaphors' is in itself taken to 'argue' (p 19)

This 'drift of the Bakhtinian method' (p 17) affects fundamentally the central Bakhtinian idea of contextual interpretation. Stam, loosely following Bakhtin, emphasizes 'a boundless context that constantly interacts with and modifies the text' (p. 20) But what this means in practice is simply the listing of parameters likely to be involved in reaching an interpretation Little is said about exactly what effect contextual factors are likely to have, or about how to *analyse* them When everything is just related to everything else, the relationship is only that of interesting but unworkable contingency The holistic framework for the 'boundless context' approach to analysis certainly does not justify the praise that it produces 'nothing less than a unitary transdisciplinary view of the human sciences and of cultural life based on the common *textual* nature of their materials'; on the contrary, it compares unfavourably with modular procedures of analysis which seek to distinguish investigable objects without nevertheless suggesting that those objects function separately from other interlocking systems or domains Failing some way of separating out specific fields of analysis, no adequate

concrete investigation is possible; and no practical application or plausible academic politics is on offer

Unsurprisingly in this context, the politics of Bakhtinian cultural studies as outlined by Stam – in fact the aspect of Bakhtin's work Stam praises most enthusiastically – remains ambiguous  Stam acknowledges the problem of co-optation· how the carnivalesque can be exploited by right, left, or liberals, and he tries to distinguish pluralism from polyphony, on the basis of an (unspecified) criterion as to whether practices merely add voices, or whether they displace, mutually relativize, or dialecticize them. (p. 231) In the end, however, Stam's only concrete response to this fundamental problem of modernist and postmodernist theory and practice is to *choose* his political affiliation  'my ideological affinities incline towards those who try to push Bakhtinian ideas in radical directions rather than toward those who recruit him as a kind of liberal pluralist'  (p. 16)

In themselves, Bakhtin's writings contain suggestive concepts and oppositions; and they can inspire detailed historical analysis (for example, of generic features and traditions with which they are in dialogue, of an audience's disparate awarenesses of, and connotations for, such traditions, of who such audiences are, and so on). Paradoxically, in this context, Stam's wide-ranging approach – apparently the book's greatest asset – is one of its most serious weaknesses. The references are so wide-ranging that no single case study is worked out in anything like appropriate detail. Coupled with the broadness of the Bakhtinian dichotomies, the commentary merely demonstrates a familiar truth of descriptive work: that the broader the grid you use and the shallower the specification of context, the easier the categories will fit  No single text or context is held in focus long enough in *Subversive Pleasures* for the real interest of the approach, or its fundamental difficulties, to appear

At best, Bakhtinian cultural studies can stimulate readers to investigate issues of the sociality of meanings, and of meanings in conflict or dialogue with other texts, genres, interests and ideologies. At worst, such studies function as pious appeals to contextualized, historicized and politicized interpretative work while actually deferring serious analysis. Applying a descriptive framework – no matter how suggestive, or how well it can be made to fit with other areas of analysis and action – is not in itself serious theoretical or political work. And it is therefore symptomatic that – throughout the book, but especially in the closing 'Envoi' – the recurrent modality of *Subversive Pleasures* (in which the name 'Bakhtin' itself appears to function as an authorial persona for Stam's own critical aspirations) involves a constantly repeated 'would'  for example, 'A Bakhtinian textual politics would favour, one would hope, a more open, reciprocal. decentered negotiation of specificity and difference .'. (p  234)

Because the 239 pages of *Subversive Pleasures* remain in this way prefigurative or anticipatory, readers should not expect them to provide more than a prolegomenon, alerting students of cultural studies to rich prospects for the future But who will these readers be? Given its problematic academic and political task, *Subversive Pleasures* has a strange implied addressee someone who needs each Bakhtinian concept to be outlined and illustrated in great detail (presumably as a consequence of reading Stam before or instead of reading Bakhtin), but who can constantly check the commentary against a massive corpus of works of film and television Finally, the book's self-description as an 'affectionate dialogue with Bakhtin's work' (p 16) betrays not a progressive but a conservative idea of how books function, when what could have been offered was a more structured and helpful dialogue with the reader.

# review article:

**Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor.***
**Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, 361 pp.**

## MICHAEL GRANT

KRISTIN Thompson begins *Breaking The Glass Armor* by making a
clear distinction between her own neoformalism and the theoretical
assumptions underlying the film theory that has preceded her. She
states unequivocally that 'neoformalism offers a reasonable sketch of
an ontology, epistemology, and aesthetic for answering the questions
it poses, and these are not commensurable with the presuppositions
of the Saussurean-Lacanian-Althusserian paradigm' (p. 29) Of the
three 'paradigmatic' figures Thompson mentions it is Lacan whose
work has proved most generative of theoretical writing on film She
begins, therefore, with some general objections to psychoanalytic
interpretations of film, objections that take up points made by
Tzvetan Todorov against Freudian interpretation as a whole For
Todorov, Freud's method of interpretation 'discovers in the objects
analysed a content in harmony with psychoanalytic doctrine . . it is
foreknowledge of the meaning to be discovered that guides the
interpretation' [1] To insist, as Freud does, on the sexual nature of the
symbols and representations found in dreams is to exemplify the
failing Todorov is pointing to This objection is, of course, an
objection to psychoanalysis in general, psychoanalysis being, in the
end, nothing other than its method of interpretation.

Thompson presents her own opposition to psychoanalysis in film
study in three ways. First, she takes up Todorov's general objection
and extends it to film interpretations based on psychoanalytic
concepts. These interpretations 'tend to be of the cookie-cutter
variety, whereby every film enacts the castration complex or the rule
"he who has the look has the power" '. (p 28) The second
objection is that most of the studies using psychoanalysis 'simply

1 Cited in *Breaking The Glass
Armor* p 14 from Tzvetan
Todorov's *Theories of the Symbol*
(Ithaca N Y Cornell University
Press 1982) pp 253–4
Although Thompson herself
discusses a piece of Freudian
film analysis, Laura Mulvey s
'Visual pleasure and narrative
cinema' she confines her
remarks to the applicability of
Mulvey's ideas to Preminger s
*Laura* (1944) and does not
consider their Freudian
underpinnings' (p 185) in more
general terms

employ a Freudian or Lacanian model of the text's internal operations (in which the film is taken as analogous to the discourse of a psychoanalytic patient) in order to interpret the film as an isolated object. The viewer becomes a passive receiver of textual structures'. (p. 28) This objection is closely linked to the third one, namely, that the subject or viewer exists largely outside history If the subject is simply conditioned by what are fundamentally unconscious structures of which the text (the film) is the site, then the spectator 'performs no significant conscious activities in viewing'. (p 28) In this case, the viewer cannot use his or her knowledge of the external world, or of other works of art. As a result, the challenge of defamiliarization, the most important function of the artwork, according to neoformalism, cannot be met, since we can only be made aware of our automatized reaction to the world if we are made conscious of that automatization Psychoanalytic theories, on the other hand, commit film to being an interminable replay of repressed, unconscious structures such as the mirror phase, or of unconscious desire. Presumably, this must take place in the same way for all spectators, no matter what stage of life any given spectator may have reached. Thus, we have to assume that all the effects of the film are created by 'structures internal to the film itself, and that it exists unchanging, outside history' (p. 28) For these reasons, Thompson concludes that the notion of the unconscious serves no useful purpose and that, as a result, it is a concept neoformalism can dispense with If these objections are indeed as decisive as Thompson considers them to be, then post-Lacanian film theory (to say nothing of Lacanian theory itself) is confronted by difficulties that are probably insuperable

*Breaking The Glass Armor* is based on other presuppositions The fundamental category that Thompson wishes to emphasize is the formalist concept of the poetic function, in which the paradigm or axis of selection is projected into the syntagm or axis of combination In literary terms, as defined by Jakobson, the poetic function promotes the 'palpability' of signs, and by so doing 'deepens the fundamental dichotomy between words and objects' In film terms, as understood by neoformalism, this means an increased awareness of the vertical dimension of a film, rather than its linear or horizontal one Attention is turned not only to the narrative system of the *syuzhet*, but also to the systematic and structural organization of style *Syuzhet* and style are conceived as two systems, one of which may dominate the other (in classical narrative, style is subordinate to *syuzhet*). Other relations – of symbiosis and equivalence – are, however, possible This understanding of the pertinence to film of the poetic function is what underlies and supports Thompson's approach. It is in terms of the poetic function that she is able to produce a general vindication of the educative role of film studies. Her notion of defamiliarization as

an educative and, indeed, a scholarly strategy follows directly from her insistence on the arbitrary nature of the *syuzhet*/style relation Neoformalism, for Thompson, assumes that film spectators are active, and that they respond to films in as much as they have learned the norms appropriate to those films, norms which are arbitrary

Such an emphasis on norms or rules reduces the importance of meaning and subjectivity, since, for Thompson, rules have an existence and significance in and for themselves, independent of the meanings they may support Hence, Thompson sees the neoformalist critic as an educator 'who places at the disposal of the spectator certain skills', as a result of which the spectator becomes more aware 'of the strategies by which films encourage spectators to respond to them' (p 33) That is to say, the perception of the contingent nature of narrative and stylistic constructions leads inevitably, in formalist analysis, to a foregrounding of devices, a procedure which is simply not compatible with the psychoanalytic commitment to interpretation. Psychoanalytic theory constructs its object in terms of features already assumed in its method of representing that object. The subject is produced as internally intimated or determined by the 'structure' of language. Neoformalism, however, takes this system of thought to be misguided defamiliarization in art is not motivated or 'caused' by psychic organization, but is the result of arbitrary and coherent construction open to accurate and specific analysis The purpose of neoformalist analysis is, therefore, not to produce an explanation of the film's genesis or an interpretation of its meaning, but so to defamiliarize the spectator that the film can be seen in the uniqueness of its own system or pattern of organization. The emphasis falls on order, not meaning Thompson's claim is that since 'everyday perception is habitual and strives for a maximum of efficiency and ease, aesthetic perception does the opposite'. (p. 36) The renewal of perception can be effected in part by breaking with the dominant canons of film analysis itself, and as a result the main body of the book consists of meticulous detailed analyses of certain films, ranging from an 'ordinary' film, such as Lloyd Bacon's *Terror by Night*, to examples of parametric narration like Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980) and Bresson's *Lancelot du lac* (1974), all of which demonstrate the approach in practice

One analysis that is particularly convincing is that of Tati's *Play Time* (1973) In Thompson's view, *Play Time* subtly alters our sense of what is funny, so that by the end of the film our notions of the distinction between the comic and the non-comic become uncertain. 'Everything begins to look strange and funny' (p. 259), so that we become unusually aware of the film's 'excess' Thompson defines 'excess' in terms of a device that retains its 'perceptual interest beyond its function in the work' (p 259) Excess in this sense is

associated with parametric form, a notion derived from Noel
Burch's *Theory of Film Practice* and elaborated by David Bordwell
in chapter 12 of his *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Parametric
narration is another version of the poetic function, in as much as in
it the stylistic system creates patterns that are distinct from the
demands of narrative  Stylistic devices retain a degree of
independence of their role in narrative, and can engage the viewer's
interest in and for themselves. Thompson demonstrates this with
examples from *Play Time*, pointing, amongst other things, to
Hulot's gag with a sponge he inadvertently places on a cheese
counter. This derives its humour from a situation which is only
potentially funny, so that as viewers we are forced to search for
humour in contexts that are hinted at but not depicted  By
foregrounding the gag structure itself, a formal device, *Play Time*
puts the comic status of jokes into play  This makes clear what
Thompson means by excess  the parametric or poetic function
requires the viewer to work on the film in such a way that what is
seen is not subordinated wholly to the film's narrative  Other
devices in *Play Time* that direct attention towards excess include
extreme simplicity in narrative causality, so that moments of
narrative significance are separated by strings of narratively
inconsequential gags. A narrative with so little by way of forward
thrust allows for a considerable deflection of interest onto the gag
structure itself, a deflection which is the manifestation of excess.
Thompson argues that this perception of excess can 'transform our
perception in general'. The imaginative perception of the modern
world shown by Hulot in the film 'is the representation within the
fiction of the perceptual skills we need to develop in watching *Play
Time*'. (p. 261) Just as we can develop these skills in response to
*Play Time*, so we can turn them back onto the modern world itself,
and in seeing the humour in the everyday 'overcome its oppression,
at least a little'. (p  262)

Similar concerns inform the analysis of Bresson. In *Lancelot du
lac*, Thompson discerns a permutational patterning that derives from
a play amongst certain devices, including shot/reverse shot structures
(foregrounded by the omission of establishing shots as well as by the
insistent regularity of their presentation), graphic matches, and
disorientation of our sense of space and time (often effected by
bringing up the sound of the next scene before the end of the
current one)  Having shown how *syuzhet* demands are counterposed
by complex stylistic patterning of this kind, Thompson goes on to
conclude that 'we should accept the idea that the intensity and
complexity of perception itself is also an end in artistic experience —
perhaps the *main* end'. (p  315) This intensity of experience derives
in parametric films from an equivalence established there between
narrative and style  It is precisely because of this twofold working on
formal material that parametric films, whether 'sparse' (Bresson,

Ozu) or 'dense' (Godard, Tati), are able to 'exploit a great range of the cinematic medium's possibilities' (p. 316)

An emphasis on parametric cinema has far-reaching implications. As David Bordwell has argued, parametric cinema changes our perspective on films, both of the past and of the present, so that 'the norms of parametric narration epitomize the historicity of all viewing conventions'.[2] In other words, an understanding of parametric films involves an alteration in our perception of cinematic specificity: conventions and rules (including the poetic function itself) have no existence in themselves. They exist only in the use the viewer makes of them A spectator can be said to understand a rule (to follow it) only against a complex background of behaviour. This pattern of behaviour makes the spectator's abilities manifest and comprises a practice a custom or regularity of applying the rule and other rules similar to it Such a practice, involving a complex of rules. has conceptual primacy over the rules that are part of it This is what it means to say that the specificity of film does not exist It makes no sense to speak of the specific properties of film art: there is no philosophically coherent notion of the cinematic fact, just as there is none of the literary fact. What Thompson has demonstrated by her move out of interpretation into the post-theoretical strategies of *Breaking The Glass Armor* is that the cinematic fact is 'no longer a philosophical category but a historical one'.[3] As Tynyanov put it in 1927 'The very existence of a fact *as literary* depends on its differential quality, that is, on its inter-relationships with both literary and extra-literary orders. Thus, its existence depends on its function'.[4] Hence, Thompson's claim for neoformalism, that it answers the epistemological, ontological and aesthetic questions it poses, appears in a new light. What *Breaking The Glass Armor* embodies is an approach to film which is justified by nothing other than the explanatory value of the approach itself.

2 David Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London Methuen 1985) p 310

3 Tzvetan Todorov *Literature and its Theorists* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p 27

4 Cited by Todorov *op cit*, p 26 from Tynyanov's 'On Literary Evolution in L Matejka and K Pomorska (eds) *Readings in Russian Poetics* (Ann Arbor Michigan Slavic Publications 1978), p 69